

Renewing Reciprocal Love

The General Statutes of the Focolare Movement, as well as the Regulations of each of its branches, contain a “premise to every other rule” a “norm of norms”: the commitment of whoever is part of the Movement to live mutual charity according to the Commandment of Jesus. In the following text, Chiara Lubich emphasizes that this commitment must be continually renewed.

[In the letter to the Romans the apostle Paul] says: “Let us cast off deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12). The “deeds of darkness” are the consequences of vices and sin. The “armor of light” is the virtues and the practice of living the Word of God in our lives.

Now, we know that the New Commandment of Jesus is the synthesis of all His commands, of all His Words. Therefore, we will put on the “armor of light” by refocusing our lives on this commandment.

The result—we know—is that the Risen Lord will be resplendent in the midst of our community. [...] So then, the “armor of light.” The New Commandment practiced with new commitment. [...]

This is an invitation that I extend to all of you.

And so that we can begin right away, let’s take a moment to look at our reciprocal love: let’s consider the measure of love (keeping in mind that it must be the same measure with which Jesus loves us: therefore to be ready to give our



lives); let’s look at where our generosity is lacking, at our limitations in loving, so that we can overcome them; let’s see if our reciprocal love may rest too heavily on a human plane, and need therefore to be raised to a supernatural level....

If we do so, if we improve our reciprocal love in this way, Jesus, the Saint, will be among us and will make this present year the holiest of our lives.[...]

Chiara Lubich

(From a telephone conference call, Rocca di Papa, 13 November, 1986)

Dear Readers,

”Synodality means walking together on the Holy Journey”. This is the simple and very profound definition that Margaret Karram gave (cf. p.2) in reference to one of the recommendations made by the Holy Father in his address to the General Assembly.

To be “on the move” in the Holy Journey is the experience of many people at the moment, especially at the International Centre of the Movement where the various coordinating and directing bodies are being established (cf. p.3/4) with new people arriving and others departing.

One of these changes concerns me personally: Kumiko Kobayashi, a Japanese focolarina, and **I will be in charge of the ‘violet’** aspect of the Movement: Unity and Means of Communication. **I have asked Stefania Tanesini to take on responsibility for the management of the Communications Office** to which the editorial of this Mariapolis magazine is linked. Stefania is an Italian focolarina and a very competent journalist.

To her, to the whole team in the Communication Office and to all of you, dear readers, I extend my warmest good wishes as we continue the Holy Journey together.

Joachim Schwind

Synodality means: walking together

In the Link up of 27 March Margaret Karram explained what Pope Francis' call for "ever greater synodality" means to her and how it fits in with the need to have people who can also make decisions.

First of all, it was very important for us to hear the Pope speak about this.

Before answering, I'd like to say that throughout the Pope's talk to us participants in the Assembly, we personally felt the Pope's love and affection for the Focolare Movement. Throughout his speech, even if it could perhaps seem parts as a reproach or something that could make us wonder - "Why are you telling us these words?" - I took it all as an encouragement, a love of the Church that wants to lead us more and more to contemporise our charism, apply it to the present day. Because the Pope in various moments of his speech kept saying to "be faithful to your charism", he often repeated what Chiara told us.

So also when he spoke of synodality, I felt it was so important that he stressed it with very powerful words. But I said to myself: what the Pope is telling us is what Chiara lived; it's what Chiara always taught us, because she always said... What does "synodality" mean for us? The word 'synodality' means 'walking together'. And this is what Chiara did all her life. This very link up that we are having now began in the 1980s because Chiara wanted all of us in the Focolare Movement to be able to walk together. But she didn't mean walking together to keep one another company to feel good. Chiara gave us her life, her personal experience with God and what God was doing in the Movement, the fruits of her charism in the whole Movement.

But above all, walking together for Chiara was - and still is for us, I hope - walking together on the Holy Journey to help one another become holy together.

So, if we transfer this to our times today, synodality is a word we know very well in the Focolare Movement - that means walking together, but it means living together according to the tactics of the Trinity, which means loving one another in order to enter deeply into this charity that has no measure, in this entering into one another so that there may truly be the Holy Spirit in our relationships.

So being involved in decisions, I feel I must emphasise it is not so as to live freedom or democracy; the charism of unity is a charism that helps us to live for unity, in unity. So if we have to make decisions, it's not that I'm ready to



listen to the other, I listen to everyone, and then (and this applies at any level of our meetings, not just at the level of governance), and then now it's over, I'll decide and I say what I think. If we really want to live synodality I have to listen to everyone, everyone has something to say.

Then I also try to change what I think, having listened to everyone else. And this seems to me very important, because if I am not ready, if each of us is not ready to give their opinion, their idea, because everyone has their own idea and every idea is a responsibility, a gift, and we are different in the way we express ourselves also because we are from different cultures and have different sensitivities. Therefore in giving our ideas we must also be ready to receive the other person's idea and together be able to use this light, this basis of mutual love, to discern something which then governs our Movement, our decisions and our activities.

So, in this sense, even at the start, since I was elected, I've stressed this, that we want these to be six years in which we can walk in synodality, in collective discernment, to be able to achieve a governance of the Movement which will not be governed by one person, and Chiara emphasised this often, but will be guided by Jesus among us, by Jesus in our midst.

In this I truly feel that each of us forms this beautiful mosaic, but each piece of this mosaic is indispensable. So if one is missing, there will be no mosaic. But this mosaic must be glued together, one next to the other, losing oneself in the beauty of the other, so that we can truly give the world around us a beautiful mosaic, and an example of synodality, of governance, of leadership that is different from the world. We are not a business organisation or a political organisation; we are a work of God.

So leadership for me means living so that God, Jesus is in our midst can shed light on our path. This is what synodality means for me.

A body of unity and service

The President of the Focolare Movement entrusted the new general councillors with their areas of responsibility and urged them to form a governing body characterized by a deep spirit of fraternal service born of mutual evangelical love.



A body of unity and service

The composition of the General Council was not yet complete when we closed this issue of the Mariapolis Newsletter. The complete list will be published in the next issue



Compiti dei consiglieri eletti

Europa



Kempt,
Donna
Lynn
(USA)



Valtr,
Vit
(Repubblica
Ceca)

Medio Oriente
+
Africa



Koller,
Friederike
(Germania)



Brüscke,
Klaus
(Brasile)

Asia
+
Oceania



Moussallem,
Rita
(Libano)



Salimbeni,
Antonio
(Italia)

America Latina
+
Nord America



Ngabo,
Bernadette
(RDC Congo)



Bartol,
Angel
(Spagna)

Responsabili della sezione delle
focolarine e dei focolarini



Lockhart,
Noreen
(Gran
Bretagna)



Roveré,
Flavio
(Brasile)



Words of Wisdom

The event remembering Igino Giordani included testimonies from the Focolare President, from people who knew Giordani and others who, although they never encountered him personally, draw upon the wisdom of this profound and multifaceted figure.

“As I was preparing for this event, I was moved when I recalled one of the most beautiful moments of my life. It was in 1978 and I was with a group of girls of my age: we had just finished a Focolare Movement youth congress when we met Igino Giordani in person in the park.” This was the personal recollection with which Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement, began her testimony during the event dedicated to Igino Giordani on 18 April 2021 on the 41st anniversary of his death. She continued, “The other people told us that he was a great personality but for them he was simply ‘Foco’. That’s how he was known by all those who loved him. He was the person who had helped Chiara Lubich in the early years of the Movement thanks to his rich experience in cultural, religious and political fields. Thanks to him, many people had come to know the ideal of unity. Moreover, since he was married, he had opened up the totally new path of consecration to the focolare for married people.”

At that time, Margaret Karram was with a group of girls from the Holy Land and when they introduced themselves to Giordani, they saw his face light up. “The reference to the Holy Land had given him great joy,” she explains. “He had such a radiant smile and such a penetrating gaze that I can still see him. He told us, ‘Remember to be another Mary!’”

“During his studies, Foco had often focused on the events and places where Jesus was born and began to preach. It was as if he had wanted to discover the most intimate aspects regarding the life of the family of Nazareth in order to be able to imitate them.”

Karram recalled that this meeting took place in the grounds of the International Focolare Centre in Rocca di Papa, Rome, Italy where Giordani, a widower, lived in a focolare during the last years of his life. He often sat on a bench in the garden and those who passed by or participated in the international meetings that took place there would greet him and often sit beside him. “We have collected many testimonies of what happened on that bench,” Margaret Karram continued. “Some young people talked about doubts regarding their faith, some parents confided in him about family difficulties, some professionals asked him for advice on how to reconcile their careers with their moral values. There were also priests and religious who asked him for help concerning their vocation. Igino listened, understood and then gave wise advice which was often decisive in solving people’s problems.”

After the President’s address during this event dedicated to Giordani, there followed several testimonies from people who as children had sat on that bench and, many years later, still treasure the richness of the conversations with him. These include Margarida Pereira Da Silva, a focolarina living in Portugal, Manoel Araujo, a Brazilian doctor and Stanislao di Piazza, a senator of the Italian Republic.

Peter Kostner, now an artist known in various parts of Europe, also sat next to Giordani when he was a boy. He is the creator of a sculpture placed in the grounds of the Focolare Movement’s Centre that represents Giordani sitting on an empty bench. “If people see the sculpture,” explained Kostner, “they will go and sit next to him. I hope they will want – or even be enticed – to learn about his ideas, his life, the person he was and thus also find inspiration for their own lives.”

As some of the speakers at the event clearly testified, Giordani continues to arouse profound interest in the academic sphere. His experience and prophetic

wisdom inspire others in making personal choices and courageous decisions on the path leading towards fraternity and peace in the political, civil and social spheres.

“I’m at the beginning of my political career, so there are a lot of opportunities to do good, but also a lot of doubts when I’m not quite sure what’s right and what’s not,” said František Taliř, young Vice President of the South Bohemian Regional Government in the Czech Republic. “In those moments,” he continued, “I often remember Iginio Giordani, I pray and ask him for help.” He referred to a time when he had experienced

conflict with a colleague in the government and he asked himself what Iginio would have done in his place. “After a few days I invited my colleague for a coffee. And even though our perspectives did not change – he saw the truth one way and I did another – we managed to find a way to move forward. I think it was a small miracle, maybe thanks to Iginio Giordani. There will always be situations like this but I believe we’ll manage to change how to do politics.”

*Anna Lisa Innocenti
April 18, 2021*

Living the Gospel: **universal fraternity**

From a sandwich to a hundredfold for the poor

One day I was in a sandwich shop, waiting to buy a sandwich, and I had just enough money for one. As I was coming out of the shop, I saw a lady looking at everyone who was eating. I realised she was hungry and was waiting for someone to offer her something to eat. I took out my sandwich and gave it to her. I can always eat something later, I said to myself. She was overjoyed. Then I took her to the fruit shop and asked the greengrocer if he could give her some fruit which I would pay for the next day since I had no money at that moment. The greengrocer gladly gave the lady not just one piece of fruit, but a whole bag of fruit, free of charge. I was so happy to see how a small sandwich could become a chain of the hundredfold.

Mumbai (India)

*Lorenzo Russo
March 18, 2021*





A Focolare community in the Fazenda da Esperança

A Focolare house opened on 14 March within the community of Guaratinguetá, in São Paulo state, Brazil. The charism of unity is a fundamental part of the Fazenda recovery program for people affected by addictions.

“What’s the secret of a life which spreads so quickly around the world? We haven’t done it, it’s God in us who does it”. In this way Father Hans Stapel explains the development of the Focolare Movement and the Fazenda da Esperança in many countries.

On 14 March a Focolare community house “Maria Madre della Speranza” was opened in the city of Guaratinguetá, in the state of São Paulo. This new house is home to a group of Focolarini from different regions of Brazil, all working at the Fazenda da Esperança.

“Through the communion between two charisms which are so closely linked, from the same roots, our mission is to try to heed the cry of humanity, to be close to those who suffer, the excluded, to give our life ever more fully to Jesus in these situations. In this way we too will bring to the world the light that comes from the presence of Jesus among us”, says Gustavo Matsumoto, one of the members of this new focolare community.

During a thanksgiving Mass, Fr Hans – who together with Nelson Giovanelli Rosendo dos Santos, Lucilene Rosendo and Iraci Leite founded the Fazenda da Esperança – reflected on the 13 years since Chiara

Lubich’s death. He explained they were inspired by the Focolare charism, which became the foundation of the spirituality of the “family”. The Fazenda da Esperança is a therapeutic community. Since 1983 it has worked with those recovering from alcohol and drug addictions. Their method is based on three main aspects: work as a pedagogical process, family life, and spirituality to find meaning in life. There are already over a hundred such communities in America, Asia, Africa and Europe.

The root which nourishes the Fazenda da Esperança is the same as the Focolare Movement, demonstrating the same desire to put the words of the Gospel into practice, above all the experience of reciprocal love.

“I think Chiara would be very happy to see this dream become reality. Two ecclesial realities living in full harmony and unity, to heal many wounds, especially where the poorest and marginalized are living, particularly those suffering from addictions”, Margaret Karram, new president of the Focolare Movement told them, via online link. As well as those overcoming dependencies, for the past year the Fazenda da Esperança has been welcoming homeless people, who are more vulnerable to the spread of Covid-19 in Brazil.

“The Focolare Movement was born during the war. Today we hear of so many deaths from Coronavirus. In all this suffering we see the possibility of giving new life to a new humanity”, said Fr Hans.

*Nicole Melhado
March 26, 2021*



God's providence: sharing in Eastern Europe

From Focolare communities in Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, where they've been experiencing the joy of giving freely to help those in difficulty.

“Our communion of goods began by observing the early Christians. We saw that there they had a communion of goods, and as a result there was no one who was poor among them...”

“So you could say that the formula is this: if the whole world were to implement the communion of goods, then social problems, the poor, the hungry, those without a legacy, etc., would no longer exist.”

This was how Focolare founder Chiara Lubich, when she launched the Economy of Communion project in 1991, explained the origins of the “communion of goods” in the movement, both material and spiritual.

In 1943 in Trento, the war had destroyed the city, and many had lost their homes, jobs and families. Faced with such despair—and in light of the words of the Gospel they meditated on in the shelters—Chiara and her early friends decided to take care of those most in need.

“Our goal was to implement the communion of goods as much as possible in order to solve the social problems of Trento. I thought, ‘There are two or three places where the poor people are... Let's go there, let's bring what we have, let's share it with them.’ Simple logic, really: we have more, they have less. We will raise their standard of living so that we will all reach a certain equality.”

Eighty years later, the communion of goods is still a vibrant reality in the movement. Each person gives freely according to his or her possibilities, often expressing gratitude for what they've received. Experiences are multiplying all over the world.

“I went to buy 10kg of wheat for my chickens,” says one person from Croatia. “The man who sold it to me did not want money. I donated what I had saved for the communion of goods, which is extraordinary in this pandemic.”

Of course, it's not always possible to donate goods and money. Still, the commitment reinforces the value of the gesture.

“I recently sold some wine to a neighbour. He gave me more money than he had to, and he didn't want any change. I gave it for the communion of goods, but it wasn't easy; I had to overcome my human way of thinking.”

The experience of receiving after giving often happens. It is the evangelical “Give and it will be given to you” (Lk 6:38) that Chiara and her early friends tangibly experienced.

“We helped some families who had lost their jobs because of the crisis caused by the pandemic, donating food, medicine and school supplies,” they write from Macedonia. “It was little help, but one of them told us that it was enough to eat for two weeks. Shortly after, another family made a donation that covered their expenses. Everything was circulating.”

The joy of giving and the joy of receiving happens frequently. In Serbia, the communion of goods reached a family with children where father and mother are sick and unemployed. They live off the produce from their garden, and to pay the bills, Toni helps out in the parish.

“When we went to bring him money, he was borrowing to buy wood. We explained to the family where the help was coming from, and they were moved because they felt that God, through us, ‘had looked their way.’”

The communion of goods, after all, is nothing more than an instrument of divine providence

*Claudia Di Lorenzi
February 10, 2021*



Taking care of the city

The commitment of a small community in the Murcia region of Spain has led to lots of activities being set up to create space for dialogue and solidarity, such as meetings between citizens and politicians, cultural events and activities responding to social and humanitarian emergencies.

Aljucer is a small town in the Murcia region of southern Spain. Twelve years ago, members of the local Focolare community asked themselves what they could do to make their commitment to living fraternity a reality which impacts on people in the local area which is located in fertile land close to the Mediterranean Sea, but which also has its fair share of large and small emergencies.

The first step was to find a way to create opportunities for participating in the life of the town which were more open and inclusive. So, in collaboration with other groups, they set up a cultural association called 'ACLF Aljucer'. "Our first experience as an association," they said, "was to bring together various mayors who had been in office in the city during the Spanish democratic period. Inviting them was not easy, but in the end they all agreed to participate. They had an opportunity to introduce themselves, recall the time when they held office and, in some cases, reconcile with one another. In the end, they thanked us and encouraged us to continue in this vein."

This experience led to the idea of holding a meeting every year to bring politicians and citizens closer together which is how "In Our Hands" and "The Speaker" were born. The first of these meetings which have now been running for twelve years," they explained, "took place before the elections and offered a safe space where dialogue between citizens and candidates was encouraged. In the second event, a topical issue was chosen, and politicians and citizens were given the floor. Speeches and proposals are collected, published on the Association's website and offered as contributions to the City Council. Some of the topics proposed have been studied in depth and, from that experience, the idea of a Cultural Centre under the authority of the Municipality arose which is now becoming a reality.

The Association also puts on cultural activities, such as concerts, book presentations and exhibitions. And there is also "Aljucereños", an event where personalities from the world of culture, music, art, literature, politics, economics and medicine talk about their life experiences and the motivation behind their choices. They also hold monthly meetings with other associations and organise an annual Associations' Fair.

But it is also important to listen and respond to the sufferings and wounds of the local area to build fraternity. "The first step we took towards solidarity," they continued, "was to organise a dinner in aid of the 'Fraternity with Africa' project which provides scholarships for young Africans who have committed to working in their home country for at least five years. This very soon became our main activity, the one for which we became known by so many. Shopkeepers and associations help organise the dinners which bring together around 200 people. Participants are updated on the project's development at every meeting".

The Association also collaborates with initiatives promoted by other organisations that support humanitarian emergencies (Philippines, Madagascar, Croatia) and has committed to helping refugees from the war in Syria. The latest activity was a fundraiser for Lebanon, after the explosions in Beirut in August 2020.

Even when there were emergencies closer to home they didn't back down. "Last year," they explained, "we made it our priority to provide water and food to the people affected by flooding in the area. We also organised volunteer activities and collected school supplies for a school in our area where a high number of pupils are at risk of exclusion. In the last year, we have supported three families affected by the pandemic by providing food, medicine and financial assistance. We disseminate all these activities through the Association's website and Facebook page which help us to promote a culture of solidarity on a large scale".

*Anna Lisa Innocenti
February 19, 2021*



Beyond the 20th Century. Chiara Lubich in dialogue with our time

A conference on the charismatic figure of Chiara Lubich, who knew how to look to the new millennium with all its epoch-making changes, proposing the ideal of universal fraternit.

An international conference “Beyond the 20th Century. Chiara Lubich in dialogue with our time” marked the official closure of the wide-ranging series of events dedicated to the centenary of the birth of the Focolare Movement’s founder. As the title suggests, the conference studied the charismatic figure of Chiara Lubich from a dynamic perspective on one of the protagonists of the 20th Century who knew how to look to the new millennium with all its momentous changes by proposing the ideal of universal fraternity, never losing the conviction that “unity is a sign of the times”.

The 2-day symposium on 18-19 February at the National Central Library of Rome, Italy, considered the figure of the Focolare Movement’s founder from different points of view. Jointly promoted by the Chiara Lubich Center at Rocca di Papa, Italy and the Central National Library of Rome, the event welcomed the collaboration of Sophia University Institute, the international New Humanity NGO and the Trentino Historic Museum Foundation. The Comune of Rome and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development offered their patronage.

The President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella conferred the prestigious Medaglia di Rappresentanza on the event, in recognition of its cultural value.

The program had four sections: historical, literary, socio-political and the fourth dedicated to other major 20th Century figures in order to analyze possible similarities and convergence with Chiara Lubich’s thought.

Such a variety of perspectives, with contributions from academics of various disciplines, each with their own cultural approach, has permitted a deeper, more mature reflection and understanding of the historic experience itself and of Chiara Lubich’s thought, as well as a greater appreciation of her intellectual, spiritual and existential legacy.

A comparison with other leading figures of the 20th century proved equally illuminating, covering contemporary protagonists such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, Mahatma Gandhi, Giorgio La Pira, Martin Luther King, Michail Gorbaciov. Chiara Lubich may not have met them directly, but she engaged with their writings and thought at a distance, with a shared passion for humanity and its future, revealing ideals and intuitions with evident features in common.

The academic papers prepared by academics from around the world, were introduced by keynote speeches from Michel Angel Moratinos (High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations) and historian Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio. Theologian and spiritual son of Chiara, Piero Coda brought the convention to a close.

Donato Falmi, member of the event’s scientific committee, described their motivations. “The biography of Chiara Lubich in its temporal, spiritual and intellectual dimensions, is notably characterized by some themes which belong at the heart of contemporary life, beyond any ethnic, social or religious difference. Among the most relevant we identify are: a constant attention and openness to what is new, the capacity and disposition to dwell in situations of conflict, searching for what unites, an attitude of measuring events with the metre of the unity of opposites. Such profoundly human

dimensions, which can be considered essential parts of the new era we are entering, open up possibilities of referring to others, of encounter and dialogue, which animate the whole project”.

The convention, streamed live online in four languages and now available on Youtube, was also the stage for the launch of the first critical edition of Chiara Lubich’s book *Meditazioni*, edited by Maria Caterina Atzori. This book was first published in 1959, translated into 28 languages, with over a million copies printed. It indicates to contemporary readers the way of unity

towards fulfilling the last testament of Jesus on earth “That all may be one”.

As a fitting finale to the convention, on Monday 22 February the closing ceremony took place of a national educational event “One city is not enough. Chiara Lubich citizen of the world”, dedicated to the world of education, involving many secondary schools across Italy. (The winning schools).

Maurizio Gentilini
March 4, 2021

Living the Gospel: **universal fraternity**

For my brothers and sisters in Lebanon

After the disaster of 4 August 2020 in Beirut, Lebanon, I asked myself what I could do to help this country which had already suffered so much. A few days later it would be my birthday: 40 years old. My family and friends wanted to celebrate with me, even if it was just a meal. This could be the perfect opportunity to help the people of Lebanon, I thought. So I asked all those coming to the dinner not to give me any presents but to make a donation to my project to help Beirut. At the end of the evening, I was amazed by the amount of money raised: a good 600 euros! I never imagined it would be so much, especially since there were very few guests at the dinner because of Covid restrictions.

This gesture then caused a chain reaction among my friends. Emilia gave the proceeds from her graduation to another project, Francesco decided to sponsor a child in a developing country for his birthday, and then the children in the neighbourhood, when they heard about our birthday initiative, gave the proceeds of the sale of products made with recycled materials



they had organised, again for Lebanon! Freely you have received, freely give... This is what we strongly believe in, always, when we receive and when we give. L., Ischia (Italy)

Lorenzo Russo
March 18, 2021



Discovering God where He seems to have disappeared

The Focolare Movement in Germany, together with other Catholic organisations, organised an online conference on the search for God in a world where He seems increasingly absent. This contributed also to the Catholic Church's synodal process in Germany.

“God disappears – and maybe, could this be necessary? God disappears – is it He perhaps who wants it this way?” These were the provocative questions that guided the programme of an online conference that was held in Germany on February 26-27. It was organized by the Focolare Movement in Germany together with the “Herder-Korrespondenz”, a monthly Catholic magazine, and the Catholic Academy of the Dresden-Meissen Diocese in the former GDR. It was meant to address one of the most urgent questions many Christians ask today: “What do we have to do and how do we have to move in a world where God seems to be no longer present?”

350 participants from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and other European countries were ready to discuss in depth the causes of an ever-increasing absence of God in society and in the lives of individuals. As Heinrich Timmerevers, the Bishop of Dresden said in his opening speech, they were even ready to ask the shocking question, “Is it perhaps the Church itself that is driving people away from God because of the crisis caused by abuse?”

In a message sent to the participants, Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement said that the theme of God's absence touches the core of the Movement's spirituality, that springs from the figure of Jesus crucified and forsaken by men and God, “the hardest moment for Jesus and at the same

time the most divine, the key to contribute towards fraternity wherever it is lacking [...] and to reach out to those who suffer most because of this darkness”.

During these two days, there were moments of critical and stimulating reflection on all that motivates a firm faith in God, despite a growing tendency towards secularism, and also on new forms of interest – especially in young people – in something transcendent that is passed on through authentic stories, experiences of deep attractiveness and a curiosity to explore new reflections on the meaning of life. During this conference, the awareness that Churches are often no longer able to meet the new religious needs of today's men and women, was also present.

The talk delivered by the German theologian Julia Knop was very strong; it was almost shocking. She started from the debate on the abuse of power and sexual violence by clerics and consecrated persons, and then continued to show that an erosion of trust in the Church is also being felt among its most faithful members. The professor of dogmatics claimed that the Church's crisis is closely linked to the faith crisis.

Stefan Tobler, the Reformed theologian stated that the absence of God could also prove to be an opportunity. While presenting traces of the mysticism in Madeleine Delbr el, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Chiara Lubich, he pointed out that the experience of God that vanishes could become precisely the place where God reveals himself. “God is found precisely where he seems furthest away. It is therefore not a question of bringing him to the world, but of discovering him in the world”.

*Joachim Schwind
March 9, 2021*



Pope Francis' image of Church and dialogue

In recent days, many people have tried to take stock of Pope Francis' trip to Iraq. I think it is difficult, if not impossible, to attempt an exhaustive one. There are too many issues involved and, above all, we are too close to this global event made up of so many other details that can only be read in the course of time. Obviously some elements more than others struck the imagination of those who followed the various events in a context that, in some ways, in its stark reality risked appearing surreal.

In fact, if we think of the model of papal journeys, inaugurated with Pope John Paul II from 1979 onwards, we were accustomed to quite different scenarios and backgrounds: oceanic crowds, choreographic preparation that often bordered on perfection and, above all, events that left the image, especially in the early years of the Polish pope's era, of a strong faith, at the centre of history, in contrast to the atheistic world from which the Polish pope came. Pope Francis, who at the beginning of his pontificate had introduced the idea of another Church, the 'accidental' and 'field hospital' Church, in recent years has been committed to transmitting this image of the Church and has done so practically everywhere he has gone. He has done so practically everywhere he has gone.

From his first official trip to Lampedusa, the port and cemetery of migrants, to Bangui, where he opened the door that inaugurated his unexpected and extraordinary Jubilee, to Mosul, where the stage had only rubble and walls still perforated by bullets of various calibers as a backdrop. And we cannot forget Tacloban where he braved an impending typhoon to stand by the survivors of another catastrophic event, Lesbos where he spent unhurriedly precious time listening to the unspeakable stories of refugees of various origins. The lesson of Francis is not just about showing that the most precious face of the

Church is the 'accidental' one. Rather, it is the way in which he shows the 'proximity', the warmth that needs to be felt by those who suffer in the Christian community. Above all, he is committed to projecting these communities onto the world stage to say that this is the true Church, which we should all cherish and which bears real witness to Christ. As he said on his return flight, Bergoglio is breathing at these junctures, because this is his Petrine call, the one for which the conclave elected him, without knowing and imagining where he would lead Peter's boat. We are all seeing and experiencing this in recent years. And the voyages are probably the truest reflection of this, leaving no room for misunderstandings.

On the other hand, this is nothing new. Like his predecessors, the Argentine pope has shown that he is able to read and decode the 'signs of the times' and offers credible testimony to the fact that the Church is a witness to its time and intercepts its problems and key issues, offering answers that are almost always against the current with respect to those that the political, international and, today, financial world impose. Faced with the reality that Francis found himself living, including the unprecedented one (at least in these terms) of the pandemic, the essential category of the pontificate, confirmed also in Iraq, is fraternity. Bergoglio's personal and ecclesial testimony, his Magisterium and his relations, especially but not only with the Muslim world, now make fraternity a geopolitical element. This was also demonstrated by his meeting with the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani. The implications of those forty-five minutes are fundamental. We all know, in fact, that the great knot that Islam must untie today is internal to its own world: the tension, never appeased but now dangerously acute, between the Sunni and Shiite spheres. It is here that the roots of many of the problems that Muslims experience and for which many also die must be sought.

Bergoglio has shown great 'political' tact in wanting to meet al-Sistani, the most significant representative of Shiism, well distanced from the Iranian theocracy that since the Khomeinist revolution of the 1980s has pushed the Iranian world to be a champion of this fringe of the Muslim kaleidoscope. Al-Sistani has always distanced himself from the theocratic choice of the Iranian ayatollahs, and has been an acknowledged spiritual and religious leader for decades. Among other things, he was born in Iran. The meeting between the two leaders took place behind closed doors, but as Pope Francis described it on the return flight, it was a moment of spirituality, "a universal message. I felt the duty, [...] to go and see a great, a wise man, a man of God. And only by listening to him do you perceive this. [...] And he is a person who has that wisdom ... and also prudence. [...] And he was very respectful, very respectful in the meeting, and I felt honoured. Even in the greeting: he never gets up, and he got up, to greet me, twice. He is a humble and wise man. This meeting had a great positive impact on my soul". Bergoglio ventured an appreciation that perhaps no pope had had the courage to say in the past: "And these wise men are everywhere, because God's wisdom has been spread throughout the world. It is the same with the saints, who are not only those on the altars. They are the everyday saints, the ones I call 'next door', the saints – men and women – who live their faith, whatever it may be, with consistency, who live human values with consistency, fraternity with consistency". All this did not go unnoticed.

Positive comments poured down from many quarters, starting with the Muslim world itself. Sayyed Jawad

Mohammed Taqi Al-Khoei, secretary general of the Al-Khoei Institute in Najaf, a prominent member of the Iraqi Shiite world and director of the Al-Khoei Institute which is part of the Hawza of Najaf, a religious seminary founded 1,000 years ago for Shiite Muslim scholars, was very clear in his appreciation. "Although this is the first meeting in history between the head of the Shia Islamic establishment and the head of the Catholic Church, this visit is the fruit of many years of exchanges between Najaf and the Vatican and will undoubtedly strengthen our interreligious relations. It was also a historic moment for Iraq". Al-Khoei affirmed the commitment to "continue strengthening our relations as institutions and individuals. We will soon travel to the Vatican to ensure that this dialogue continues, develops and does not stop here. The world faces common challenges and these challenges cannot be solved by any state, institution or person alone". The AsiaNews agency also reports some of the positive comments that appeared in the Iranian press, which gave wide coverage and celebrated the historic meeting as an "opportunity for peace". The news was the opening headline in the Islamic Republic's newspapers and media outlets. Sazandegi, who is close to the reformist wing, emphasised that the two religious leaders are today "the standard-bearers of world peace". He called their face-to-face meeting in the home of the Shiite spiritual leader 'the most effective event [in the history of] dialogue between religions.

Roberto Catalano
March 12, 2021



The Chiara Lubich Centre for the elderly in Amazonia

From the commitment of a small Focolare community to the most vulnerable, a Centre for the elderly has been opened in a village in the Peruvian jungle, named after the Movement's founder.

Four years ago I, Jenny, my husband, Javier, and our three daughters travelled here from Argentina to live in deepest Peru, bringing the Ideal of Unity with us. Shortly after we arrived in Lámud, a town in the middle of Amazonia, hearing that the Bishop of the Diocese was passing through, we ran to greet him and introduced ourselves as members of the Focolare Movement. "How wonderful that the focolare has arrived in Amazonia!", he said and gave us his blessing, with his wish that we go ahead.

Then we made an agreement with the parish priest who asked us to be responsible for Pastoral Care and Family Catechesis in the villages forming part of the parish. We went to the outskirts of town to understand the social reality in the area, sometimes accompanied by our daughters and discovered a hidden Lámud, one that was full of suffering.

We decided to start with the least and realised that they were the elderly. Some of them did not even have a decent bed to die in. Keeping Chiara Lubich's meditation entitled "One city is not enough" in mind, we went around the suburbs of the country looking for those who were alone, abandoned, to caress them, bring them a word of hope, food, clothes, and we asked them to pray for us as we were just beginning our adventure in these areas which were completely new to us.

After a while, we began to dream of being able to give the elderly a decent home, a hot meal and, most importantly, that they would feel accompanied and no longer alone. A dream which, on the one hand seemed

far away, but on the other seemed almost within reach so much so that we said to ourselves: "Yes, we can! We must do something more concrete than a simple visit.

Together we drew up a plan: just a few lines but each sentence encouraged us to go ahead. We also thought about what we would call the house. We looked into each other's eyes and decided to call it: "Hogar y Centro de Día para Adultos Mayores, Chiara Lubich" ("The Chiara Lubich Home and Day Centre for Elderly People").

Gradually, our dream started to take shape. We organised a number of events and made contact with a few people who were really enthusiastic about the project. I, Jenny, already had some experience of volunteering for different projects in Argentina and an opportunity arose for her to be employed by the Lámud District Municipality to work for the elderly! Lastly, we felt encouraged by the words of the Pope who invited us lay people to work in favour of the most vulnerable, especially during this time of pandemic.

In short, there were so many beautiful coincidences that made us think that Jesus would be happy to see the birth of a Work for the least in the Peruvian wilderness, namely a dignified home for the elderly of the third age in this Amazonian province.

In the meantime, we saw how everything was going ahead at a dizzying pace. So, trusting fully in God's Providence and the power of prayer, we became increasingly aware that Jesus would not leave us on our own, and we were certain that, with our small community, we would never be alone.

During that time, we signed the lease for the house and went through the legal process of setting ourselves up as a non-profit association. A group of people

from the community had already joined the project on a voluntary basis. They had responded with a very strong “Yes” to committing to work for the benefit of the most vulnerable people in the village of Lámud and the Province of Luya (Dipartimento Amazonas).

We started preparing the place straight away so that we could start offering the elderly one hot meal a day, provided by the municipality. And now, little by little, we are assessing each step to be taken to reach our goal of offering the elderly, who are at risk of loneliness

and abandonment, food but also the possibility of permanent residence in the Centre.

But more than titles, names and statutes, our desire is that the atmosphere of unity, harmony and family that Chiara Lubich left us as her legacy should reign in the house which is why the Centre bears her name.

Jenny and Javier, with the community of Lámud (Dipartimento Amazonas, Peru).

*Experience received and translated
by Gustavo E. Clariá
March 13, 2021*

Living the Gospel: **universal fraternity**

Give and it will be given to you

Father David from Kenya wrote, “I was helping a poor refugee boy I had got to know during the mission in Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya by paying for his schooling but after a while I ran out of money and was no longer able to support him. I explained this difficulty to him and we said goodbye to one another.

After some time, this boy sent me a message via social media asking me for help again. It was a great suffering for me not to be able to help him so I decided to sell a cow I had at my parents’ house to pay for his schooling. He was so happy to be able to go back to school again.

In the new parish where I have been living for almost a year, the parishioners decided to visit me one day because they had heard that my father was not well. Among the gifts they brought were three cows. I could not believe it. It really seemed as if God wanted to say to me “a good measure, pressed



down, full and overflowing will be poured into your lap”. (Father David, Kenya)

*Lorenzo Russo
March 18, 2021*



A living journey to deepen faith

This is the journey towards the next World Youth Day in 2023. The story of a young woman from the Focolare who is collaborating in planning the event.

The next World Youth Day will take place in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, in 2023 with the theme “Mary got up and went in haste” (Lk 1:39). The pandemic leaves open questions regarding the event, but the preparatory work has been underway for some time. **Mariana Vaz Pato, a young woman from the Focolare Movement**, is part of the local team working to organise the event.

The motto of the WYD chosen by the Pope recalls Mary’s “yes” to God and her haste to reach her cousin Elizabeth, as recounted in the Gospel. **What does this mean for young people today, especially in this time of pandemic?**

“This theme, first of all, shows us an action “Mary got up”. We can understand that the Pope challenges us to get out of our comfort zone, to get up and go to meet the other person. Secondly, we have Mary’s “yes” to God, which serves as an example for us to also say our “yes” and go on mission. The Pope launched the theme in 2019, before this pandemic existed. At this moment, the theme chosen may seem contradictory to what we are living but it tells us that the pandemic cannot be an obstacle in following God, who makes possible what seems impossible.”

Young people all over the world are urged to identify themselves with Mary. She is an outstanding model: **how can we let ourselves be inspired by her in our daily lives?**

“In Panama, the Pope said that Mary is God’s “influencer” and that in her simplicity she said her “yes”, becoming the most influential woman in history.

It is true that transforming the world is an ambitious mission, but Mary was able to do it with her virtues. If we follow her example, we are on the right track”.

How far have you got with the preparations for the event? How many young people are expected?

“Given the current circumstances it is difficult to make predictions. The logo was launched in October, the symbolic presentation ceremony was held in November and the anthem was recently launched. An itinerary of catechesis has also been developed so that WYD is not just an event but a living journey, a deepening of faith. We don’t know what the world will be like in 2023, but the teams are working to make this event a decisive moment in the lives of young people and for the renewal of the Church and of society”.

Some young people from the Focolare Movement are involved in this preparatory work...

“The Church is organising itself in committees that prepare the programme and take care of the logistical aspects. As a Movement we are present in these committees with young people, men and women focolarini, couples and people involved in the parish movement, with various tasks: from youth ministry to communication with the local communities and the parish movement in Portugal. Then there is communication with the area of Western Europe and with the youth centres of the Movement. This experience is a challenge, with all the uncertainty of these times, but it is also a joy to discover the contribution we can make as a Movement and, above all, to be able to make this journey together with the Church”.

*Claudia Di Lorenzi
March 24, 2021*



P. Paolo Bachelet
Italia
1922 - 2020

Fr. Paolo Bachelet S.J.

29 March 1922 – 1 November 2020. A Jesuit priest and long-standing Focolare member, he was a great educator and spiritual director.

Just before dawn on the feastday of All Saints, in the infirmary of the Jesuit Fathers in Rome, Fr Paolo Bachelet left for his Father's House. He had celebrated his 98th birthday on 29 March 2020. Fr Paolo entered the Society of Jesus on 7 December 1941. He was ordained priest on 7 July 1951 and completed his formation with solemn final vows on 3 February 1958.

He got to know the Focolare Movement and the spirituality of unity in the 1950s while studying theology at the Gregorian University. Among his fellow students was Pasquale Foresi, co-founder of the Movement. Immediately a spiritual bond formed between them which never waivered. Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich "entrusted" a phrase of the Gospel for him to live in a particular way in his daily life, so that it could become his own Word of Life: "He must increase but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

He welcomed the spirituality of the Focolare and became part of the group of religious men belonging to the Movement. For many years he worked in the regional seminary at Anagni, Italy, then in the University Chapel of La Sapienza in Rome. He was a great educator and spiritual director. Many seminarians continued to turn to him for spiritual guidance even after they left Anagni, including those who later became bishops.

In the University Chapel of La Sapienza, where he lived from 1987 to 2003, he was much loved and sought after as a spiritual accompanier by both students and academics alike. It was a constant source of edifying spiritual enrichment to live a strong spiritual relationship with him. He had a great capacity to

listen. He really knew how to set himself aside in order to fully welcome the other person. When he communicated what was in his soul with the small group of other religious men who shared the life of the spirituality of unity with him, he often commented that in many conversations he would find himself faced with issues for which he had no pre-prepared answer. This never concerned him, because he would always experience how the person who was confiding a particular problem, having been listened to discreetly and attentively by Fr Paolo, would find the light and answer within themselves. He communicated this as a fruit of the spiritual presence of Jesus in that moment between him and the person speaking, according to the Gospel promise "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:15-20). He was well primed in Moral Theology and Canon Law.

He had a special dedication to families. In the 1990s, together with a married Focolarino and other Focolare members, he was involved in the formation of the Separated Christian Families Association. He supported the association's branch in Rome for many years until 2017, when he was transferred to the infirmary in Via dei Penitenzieri, Rome.

He followed the preparations and progress of the Synod of Bishops on the Family with close interest. And in fact some of his observations which reached the Synod General Secretary made their way into the final document, *Amoris Laetitia*.

We recall Fr Paolo as a spiritual son of Chiara Lubich and as a true brother sharing the Spirituality of Unity. He is surely continuing to follow us from heaven.

Fr. Armando Ceccarelli S. J.
February 12, 2021



Arthur George Baum
Inghilterra
1928 - 2021

Arthur George Baum: for many, for all, a special brother

Arthur George Baum left for heaven on February 4th 2021 at the age of 92, in Augsburg, Germany.

He was born on May 18th 1928 in Hinckley, a town in the county of Leicestershire, in the heart of England. Single, a Volunteer of God and a member of the International Volunteers of the Focolare, he worked for many years at Vatican Radio, people there have beautiful memories of him.

In the last month of his earthly life, he was in a nursing home as he underwent surgery on his femur, fractured after a fall.

He was one of the first Volunteers of God and formed the first nucleus at the International Volunteer Centre.

He was renowned for his humour, which was obviously English, but he was also very tidy, one might say German, and as precise as someone Swiss, but above all he managed to overcome obstacles with Italian genius. Hèctor Lorenzo (God's Volunteer and Arthur's friend) tells us that, even in tragic physical situations Arthur could add humour. One evening after 11 p.m., he received a phone call: 'It's Arthur, I have a haemorrhage in my leg'. Hector, with his wife and son, rushed to Arthur's flat and, after initial assistance, immediately called an ambulance. Before getting into the ambulance, Arthur uncovered his mouth from the blankets that had sheltered him from the cold and confided to Hèctor: "You know, I'm missing something". Hector asks him what? And he said: "My hat!".

For the last ten years he was happily settled in Germany. Those who know Arthur know that he loved the strong winds of Ireland and the north of England, was moved by a flower, sang Tyrolean songs and some Elvis Presley themes. He rejoiced in the silence of Gothic churches or Gregorian chant, appreciated warm wine in winter and made a small amount of the drink 'mead' which he could not help but share with his friends. He also shared hot goulash and some oriental cuisine.

He was very demanding in building a strong unity in the nucleus of Volunteers: he always started by loving everyone first in order to generate mutual love, always finding an intimate dialogue of mercy.

Hèctor recounts: "Having been a companion in the same nucleus at the Volunteers' Centre and living with my family next door to Arthur's flat, we were enriched by his unique personality and evangelical witness. Our son, Julián, says: "Arthur is his name, but you could call him Humility, Generosity, Welcoming".

Arthur was a man of distinction, of essential words, of intimate religiosity. He knew how to move from serious reflections to healthy irony; to distinguish constructive attitudes from useless or harmful ones. His eloquent smile will always express gratitude.

Lorenzo Russo
April 8, 2021

Members of the Movement who have concluded their earthly life:

- **19 November 2020** *Humberto Luiz Sada de Almeida* - focolarino from Brazil
- **15 December 2020** *Giuseppe Garagnani* - focolarino from Italy
- **17 December 2020** *Gerta Vandebroek* - focolarina from Belgium
- **18 December 2020** *Peter Unger* - married focolarino from Germany
- **18 December 2020** *Carmen Casamento Amarillo* - married focolarina from Argentina
- **18 December 2020** *Cris Sapnit* - married focolarino from the Philippines
- **01 January 2021** *Eusebio Costanzo* - priest focolarino from Italy
- **03 January 2021** *Lella Sebesti* - italian focolarina from Holland
- **06 January 2021** *Stella Aliquò Manganello* - married focolarina from Italy
- **13 January 2021** *Juan Carlos Trejo Medina* - married focolarino from Mexico
- **13 January 2021** *don Costanzo Belotti (Tino)* - priest focolarino from Italy
- **22 January 2021** *Fernando (Fernan) Pinea* - married focolarino from the Philippines
- **30 January 2021** *Beda Wehrle* - focolarino from Switzerland
- **02 February 2021** *Jean-Paul Brotel* - french focolarino from Roman Mariapolis
- **10 February 2021** *Thomas Hamm* - married focolarino from Germany
- **11 February 2021** *Pina Troianello Silvestri* - married focolarina from Roman Mariapolis
- **20 February 2021** *Dalia Pasquariello Mirto* - married focolarina from Italy
- **21 February 2021** *Lucia (Lucy) Comolli* - focolarina from Switzerland
- **22 February 2021** *Denise Catherine Mills* - married focolarina from Australia
- **04 March 2021** *Giovanna (Roberta) Tironi* - focolarina from Roman Mariapolis
- **15 March 2021** *Francesco Liistro (Ciccio)* - focolarino from Italy
- **18 March 2021** *Anna Maria Guercini Corrente* - married focolarina from Italy
- **20 March 2021** *Miguel Lobatón* - focolarino from Spain
- **22 March 2021** *Salus Urs Kerber* - focolarino from Switzerland
- **23 March 2021** *Giuseppina (Giuse) Corti* - focolarina from Roman Mariapolis

Contributions to the Mariapolis newsletter:

Dear Readers, this printable Pdf newsletter contains the most important articles published in the "Mariapolis" section of the Focolare Movement's international website (www.focolare.org/mariapoli).

You can download it from the site or receive it by email by activating the link.

*It is a **free service** from the Communications Office.*

We are always grateful to those who wish to continue to support our work financially and in that way contribute to the spreading of the charism of unity.

The editorial staff

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