



Jesus among us

If we knew that an important person had decided to come and stay at our house for a few days, we would certainly make sure that the door was open when they arrived. We would prepare for their visit and arrange everything with that person in mind.

Now, we know that Jesus himself is with us every day, until the end of the world. What should we do then? I think it's a good idea, first of all, to know where we can find him. We know that he is present in the Eucharist, in the poor, in those who act and speak in his name, in those in authority, in his Word and in each one of us, through grace.

But this year, we members of the Focolare have come to understand that he wants us to find him in one place in particular: in our midst. This what he wants; this is his desire. In fact, one of his goals when he brought the Focolare to life was to be able to be present everywhere, not only within church walls or other buildings, but among people, wherever they live, wherever they are.

... May he reign among us! May he remain with us, so that ... we can be with him. We couldn't ask for a better friend on our journey; and we cannot measure the effects of his divine companionship.

Chiara Lubich

(Chiara Lubich, *Rendere facile la vita a Gesù tra noi* [Making life easy for Jesus in the midst] in Chiara Lubich, *Gesù in mezzo* [Jesus in the midst], Città Nuova, 2019, pp. 73-74)

Dear Readers

The annual meeting of the Focolare delegates and the General Council (pages 4 and 5) brought to an end a year's work, commitment and life of Focolare members worldwide and gave a fresh start to a new one. The year 2019/2020 will be a special one: the Movement will be celebrating Chiara Lubich's centenary; it will be holding its General Assembly, and it will be focussing on Jesus in the midst of the community, a spiritual theme of central importance for the Focolare Movement.

The Movement's life during the past year shows quite clearly that the "New Structure" project is bearing its first fruit: lighter structures seem to contribute to new creative forces; new forms of proclamation and evangelization are being initiated, and the synergies among the various branches of the Movement

and with other ecclesial and lay realities are taking place. All this emerged even during the Delegates meeting.

How are we to face the coming year? President Maria Voce and Co-President Jesús Morán reminded us of a very interesting indication that Pope Francis communicated during a private audience they had with him: "Pursue the prophecies of Chiara" (page 12).

His words are an exhortation. Generally, prophecies are uncomfortable; they interrupt existing patterns, they launch towards a future, which is often unknown. Chiara's charism has this prophetic force, even today! Are we aware of this?

*Joachim Schwind
Focolare Communication Office*



The Focolare's first Youth Assembly

Two hundred young people from 67 countries representing all the various youth expressions of the Movement worldwide are gathering together for the first time in Rome: young people belonging to different Churches, some followers of different religions, from a wide variety of different cultures. All have been called together in order to draw up proposals and a shared vision for the next six years.

“There’s a new thirst for something challenging and authentic among young people now. We’re very aware of the issues facing today’s world. And we realise that it’s too difficult to do anything about them on our own. We know how to link up with many other young people who want to be agents of change. And we can work together with the older generations too”. So speaks Nicholas, a 27-year-old Italian and Amanda, 29, from Brazil. Both are members of the commission preparing the Focolare Movement’s first international Youth Assembly, taking place at Castel Gandolfo, near Rome, Italy, 10th to 15th September 2019. The idea for this Assembly first emerged in 2017 and has developed since then through numerous pre-Assemblies of youth in various locations around the world.

Why this Youth Assembly?

“It’s because we feel that ‘we are’ the Focolare Movement. It’s part of us. Many young people had expressed the desire to meet together and talk about issues important to our generation. At the same time, Focolare members older than us were asking how we view the Movement and the specific contribution we as young people can make today to become ever more dedicated to the cause of a united world. We ourselves identified the main topics to be covered by the Assembly. We’ve researched dynamic engaging methods to enable the young people present to express themselves freely while sharing “an experience of God”.

Who’s taking part?

There will be 200 young people, representing all continents (67 countries): Youth for a United World, young members of the Parish and Diocesan Movements, Seminarians (known as ‘Gens’) belonging to the Focolare Movement and young religious and consecrated men and women in formation (known as ‘GenRe’). So this is an innovative development for the Focolare – to bring together in this Assembly representatives of all the different youth expressions within the Movement. To facilitate the spirit of collaboration, a preparatory commission was formed in November 2018, comprising 15 people from the different youth wings in various parts of the world, most being aged under 30, with just a few older people too.

What will be discussed in the Assembly?

We thought the best way to ascertain the thoughts and desires of our young people around the world was through a questionnaire. In the preparatory Commission we drew up 4 questions asking young people to describe two characteristics of someone identifying as a young Focolare member; to indicate 2 strong points and 2 things they would like to change in the Movement, giving reasons; to reflect on how to ensure the young people’s voice is heard within the Focolare Movement; to identify priorities for the forthcoming six years. No less than 7,300 responses came in! We felt the weight of responsibility as we collated all this input. From reading it all, we were able to produce a resource for the pre-assemblies around the world, which also nominated their own regional representatives. We then incorporated the feedback from these preliminary meetings into a working document for the main Assembly. It presents proposals, pointers and new perspectives on the international Assembly’s four central themes: formation and

accompanying; going outwards; the identity of Focolare youth; the role of Focolare youth as protagonists.

Now we're all ready to be amazed and surprised by our Assembly! It will certainly provide a strong new impetus to go forward towards fulfilling Jesus' dream:

“That all may be one” (John 17:21), as we give our own contribution to the building up of a more united world.■

Anna Lisa Innocenti

Youth Assembly 2

‘Unity’ ‘courage’ and ‘communicate’. With these three words the president of the Focolare opened the movement’s Youth Assembly which runs from 10 to 15 September.

As the 190 delegates were being introduced to Focolare President Maria Voce and Co-President Jesús Morán, the overwhelming impression was of a parliament for the under-30s, serving not a single nation but the whole world. These young members of the Focolare Movement from 67 different countries have convened in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome, Italy, for the Focolare’s first Youth Assembly of Gen, young religious men and women, seminarians, together with youth active in the Parish and Diocesan movements of the Focolare.

“We’re not only here to organize and plan, but mainly to get to know each other and communicate what is actually motivating us, what’s at the heart of our choice to work towards a more united world,” explained one of the Assembly team.

The delegates are drawn from different geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds. They are active in areas such as justice and peace, disarmament, humane economy, environmental campaigning, dialogue between religions and ethnic groups. Many have been involved in challenging summer projects such as the Gen Congress in Amman, Jordan for young Focolare members in different nations of the Middle East and beyond; another in Oceania; workshops tackling legal and economic inequalities, as well as summer-camps organized by the Parish and Diocesan Movements.

The Assembly is designed to promote sharing, learning and planning, drawing on the support of experts. It is distinctly “hands-on”. For example tackling issues of identity and life choices; how to be protagonists and effective leaders; witnessing and participation. The Catholic Church’s recent synod dedicated to youth led to the popularly-received “Christus Vivit” document, which will also be discussed during the workshops.

To guide all this activity, the Focolare President proposed three key words: unity, courage, communication. Unity – Maria Voce encouraged the young people to “forget” where and what they come from, in order to be able to live complete mutual love and so experience the unity that comes from this. Courage – “I expect you to have such courage. I also expect your courage to test and challenge the rest of us”. Inviting them to speak out and share, she encouraged them not to shy away from making criticisms, but always to express them in “a constructive spirit”.

Finally, she urged them to communicate the charism of unity. “You must be prepared to give what you have received to the new generations. This communication can only happen through people who live the spirituality, who want this charism and who then communicate it”. Everything covered during the Assembly will be summarized in a final document containing the contributions and concerns of the young generation of the Focolare as they seek ways of working ever more closely together for their shared goal. ■

Stefania Tanesini



Authentic, frank and courageous

Meeting of delegates from around the world 1

At the conclusion of their assembly, Focolare youth presented to the Movement a summary document of a process which was not always smooth. It will contribute to the international annual meeting of delegates from around the world just underway in Italy.

The timing could not have been better: the last two days of the Focolare Youth Assembly, Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 September, coincided with the first two days of the annual meeting of delegates of the Focolare Movement from around the world. This gave the 190 youth of 66 countries from the various sections of the Movement the possibility to present to a truly representative international Focolare forum the summary of their work on the identity, formation and role in the Movement of young people and their commitment in the world. The 44 delegates representing the geographical regions of the Focolare welcomed this opportunity to more fully appreciate the sensitivities, hopes and expectations of the new generations.

The impact of Saturday morning, 14 September, was strongly felt. The final document produced by the young

people, and the questions they directed at the “more mature generations”, as they light-heartedly called them, indicate how challenging their task had proved to be. In the course of only a few days, they experienced and faced up to their many differences of background, culture, sensitivity, religion and beliefs. With authenticity and courage they considered difficulties and open questions which provoked concern and suffering in many of the participants. What was even more striking in this process was the human and spiritual depth evident throughout their work: a profoundly felt and tireless desire to dedicate all areas of their life to the goal of unity on a big scale, a more “united world”, and their readiness to approach painful situations with a preferential love for Jesus in his abandonment on the cross.

On this solid basis, the young participants enthusiastically encouraged the whole Movement to appreciate diversity as an integral and essential part of any experience of unity, and to create spaces and tools to better facilitate dialogue on controversial subjects. They requested more participation in the direction of the Movement both at local and central levels in order to be able to share in the responsibility for the future generations. But with the same frankness, they expressed their own need to be better formed in the spirituality of the Focolare and to deepen their relationship with the older generations in the Movement.

In response, Focolare President and Co-President, Maria Voce e Jesús Morán highlighted the importance and maturity of the experience these young people have shared in just a few days. They recognized in this Assembly and its final document “a fundamental step ahead and a great legacy for the Movement”.

The afternoon of this memorable day was dedicated to the inauguration of the restructured auditorium of the international headquarters of the Focolare Movement in Rocca di Papa (near Rome, Italy). It was also the occasion for Maria Voce to present to both assemblies the thematic spiritual talk for the forthcoming year, centred on the reality of Jesus present in the midst of “two or three united in his name” (cf Mt 18:20). This is the Alpha and Omega of the Movement’s spirituality, declared Focolare President, as she spoke movingly and very personally, at this the start of the final year of her term of office.



Living mutual love even in the most painful moments, creating space for Jesus to be present among people today, transmitting his joy to them: this is the pathway Mary Voce invites the Focolare to journey along in the forthcoming months. For the youth Assembly parti-

cipants, it could also be a key to understanding the experience of these intense days together. For the international delegates, it will give impetus to their consultations now getting underway. ■

Joachim Schwind

Starting and finishing line

Meeting of delegates from around the world 2

The annual meeting of the delegates of the Focolare Movement concluded in Rocca di Papa. Among the priorities for 2020 is a new commitment in the field of human rights and justice, the centenary of Chiara Lubich and the next General Assembly of the Focolare Movement.

Finally we made it! An extended communion among the participants of the annual meeting between the delegates of the Focolare Movement worldwide and the General Council, was held from September 14th to 28th 2019 in Rocca di Papa. It highlighted the principle that had got the conference underway and that will be the guiding principle for the entire Movement in the coming year: everything that is done in the name of the Movement in the ecclesial, social or cultural fields, as an activity for children or adults, families or those engaged in politics, makes sense only if it is characterized and guided by the presence of Jesus in the midst of those who love one other as He taught.

This does not mean that the Focolare is becoming entirely spiritual. In fact, the first part of the meeting was dedicated to gathering the life of the Movement. With the distinctiveness of the different ecclesial, political and cultural environments in which the Movement is located, social and educational projects were presented, as well as the commitment to refugees in areas receiving little media coverage, artistic initiatives and actions promoting human dignity.

During this exchange it was clear that the reform, which has been underway for some years under the title “New Set Up”, is bearing its first fruits. In many parts of the world, leaner structures seem to release new creative energy. New forms of proclamation and evangelization have developed synergies between the various branches of the Movement and with other ecclesial and lay realities. There is also a new balance being achieved in the relationship between central government and geographical areas, that is, between global sensitivities and local action.

While respecting the diversity present within the Movement - such as those of cultures, confessions, strengths and resources- in this balance it has been possible to identify together the priorities to be addressed in the coming year 2019/2020. Under the motto “In time for Peace” the Movement will commit itself in the fields of human rights, peace, legality and justice following a pathway proposed by young people. Efforts will be made to try and involve other people and institutions to take concrete and important steps in these fields. The centenary of the birth of Chiara Lubich will take centre stage in the coming months. The activities that begin on December 7th, 2019 with the title “Celebrate to meet” want to offer the possibility of a living encounter with the foundress and her charism. Finally, 2020 will also be marked by the General Assembly of the Movement, which takes place every six years, offering new perspectives.

“But everything we do has a single purpose” - said Maria Voce, President of the Focolare, at the end of this meeting. “We want to transform the world, giving visibility to the presence of Christ in it, through the mutual love among us”. This is - so to speak - the typical “soft skill” of the Focolare, its “transversal expertise”. It is not produced with methodologies and programming, but it is the foundation of everything, the starting and finishing line. ■

Joachim Schwind





Telephone calls to the world

300 telephone conversations made by Chiara Lubich during conference calls with Focolare communities worldwide have been edited into one volume. Maria Caterina Atzori, one of the steering committee members entrusted with the "Works of Chiara Lubich", at the Chiara Lubich Centre in Rocca di Papa (Rome), is interviewed about this book.

Conversations is the second volume in the series "Works of Chiara Lubich". The first volume, "Words of Life", was published by the New City Press, in collaboration with the Chiara Lubich Centre, in 2017. Can you tell us more about this second volume?

In the book "Conversations" there are 285 spiritual thoughts, which Chiara Lubich wrote between 1981 and 2004. She shared them personally with Focolare communities in various parts of the world during telephone conference calls made from time to time. These rich thoughts speak about life and delineate a spiritual journey in its various stages, lived in the light of the charism of unity. Chiara traces a path to collective holiness, one that opens a new road marked by its communitarian dimension and that leads us to God "together" with our neighbour. She was the first one to embark on this journey, but at the same time she was joined by those, who were led by her example and guided by her "telephone calls". They accepted her invitation to set out together on this "Holy Journey" of life, an expression Chiara used to define this journey which recalls Psalm 83.

Has Chiara Lubich created a "new literary genre"?

Chiara had no intention of creating a new literary genre. In fact, the texts in this volume were not meant for a written publication. This came later on. Initially, New City Press published them in small booklets, as they were widely requested not only by Focolare members, but also by others who met the Charism of Unity.

These texts were written one at a time; they were written to be "spoken", to be transmitted through the use of the telephone set. The novum of their "literary genre" lies in the fact that during each telephone call the speaker managed to create an immediate dialogue with her listeners; she formed a family worldwide, a family united in its commitment to walk the "Holy Journey" of life together. Later on, these same texts were put together for publication.

So, in this sense, one can say that "Conversations" brought to life a new literary genre: a genre that combines word, communicative methodology and life, and establishes an intimate and profound dialogue between the author and her interlocutors, in a broader sense between broadcaster and listener, writer and reader.

What are the characteristics of these texts?

The text of each telephone call is presented in the book as a letter. Although each one is contextualized in time and space, yet it is still aims at establishing direct contact with its new readers, who are addressed with the opening words: "Dear all". These "conversations" are still happening, not through the telephone set but through the pages of a book.

Chiara uses a language rich in



warmth and colour; that goes well with both young and old, people from different social backgrounds. From time to time, she engages in contemporary reality, interprets man's life in the light of the Charism of Unity, recounts her experience about the thought she wants to transmit, interacts with her interlocutors, proposes a motto to be lived till the next telephone appointment (in the book: till the next letter). She expresses her spiritual thought through concrete daily images, familiar to her interlocutors. Frequently, she uses similarities, metaphors and slogans that are lively and easy to remember. Thus, her message is clear, engaging and "easy" to live. And each of these texts continues to invite the reader to live the message.

We have been told that the "Opera omnia" (the complete work) of the Focolari foundress is to be published in a series of volumes. The first one was "Words of Life", and now we have the second one. May we know what are the next scheduled publications?

We prefer to speak about "Opere" (works) rather than about "Opera omnia". In fact, the documentary material signed by Chiara Lubich is very substantial and there might be further acquisitions. This material needs to be sorted out and catalogued, a process that takes quite a long time. However, we already have the possibility of editing a corpus of works, drawn from both published

and unpublished material, that offer the legacy of her thought in a systematic way. The series "Works of Chiara Lubich" is meant to achieve this.

It will consist of 14 volumes, organized into three main thematic areas: 1. The Person; 2. Spirituality (the first two volumes published by New City Press, Words of Life and Conversations, are part of this second section); 3. Work (the next volume, which will contain speeches in the civil and ecclesial spheres, falls under this third section. It is work in progress, expected to be finished within the next year).

Are these texts only published in Italian? Are there any publications in other languages?

The volume Words of Life is currently being translated into English. We hope that Words of Life and Conversations will soon be translated into several languages. Both the individual spiritual thoughts and the comments on the Words of Life have already been translated into various languages for immediate communication with non-Italians; so we hope that the volumes of the series "Works of Chiara Lubich" will soon be in bookshops in a wide range of languages. ■

Edited by Anna Lisa Innocenti

The gospel lived

Holidays

My husband and I have different ways of relaxing. I like sports and swimming but he likes to visit new places and museums. This year, as the holidays approached, I felt more than ever the need to rest and recover my strength, but a voice inside me kept telling me not to express and impose my preferences, but rather to adapt to what my husband would like. But he also tried to do the same with me. This meant that both of us were detached from our personal projects and this made our holidays more beautiful and restful than ever before.

B.S. – USA

From enemy to sister

One of my nursing colleagues did everything possible to make my life difficult. Her actions made me suffer. One day, I went to work with a bouquet of flowers and offered them to her with a smile. I will never forget

her expression of amazement. It was the beginning of a new phase in our relationship. Now we have become like sisters.

Annamaria – Italy





Peru: Jenny and Javier - A Calling in the Amazon Rainforest

Only weeks before the Pan-Amazon Synod, Gustavo E. Clariá traveled to a Peruvian village in the Amazon rainforest. He tells the story—not of fires, deforestation, oil companies, or precious-metal seekers—but of Jenny and Javier, who chose to live in the South American Amazon with the desire to bring, as a family, the light of the Gospel to “poorest of the poor.”

“From Argentina, we decided to move to Lámud, Peru,” said Javier, “the town where Jenny was born, in what is called ‘Ceja de Selva’ (half jungle, half mountain). It’s located near to where the great Marañón and Amazon rivers begin. We wanted to be close to her parents, who are now elderly and in delicate health.”

Javier is Argentinian. He met Jenny while she was studying in Rosario, Argentina. They have three daughters, aged 2, 4, and 17. They sold “what little they had” and left for the Amazonas, Peru’s poorest region, 1,600 kilometers from Lima and 14 hours from the nearest Focolare house.

Moving from a big city like Rosario to a town with 2,500 residents at 2,300 meters elevation was a big

change for the family and it was especially challenging for Javier. “We knew we wouldn’t be making a return trip,” he said.

At a young age, both Javier and Jenny met the Focolare’s spirituality of unity; they now wanted to live the Gospel as a family. That’s why “their biggest concern” was to get to a place where they “would be alone,” with no one with whom to share this ideal of unity. They decided to do everything they could to bear witness and proclaim the Gospel with their lives, so that even in the Amazon, a seed of the spirituality of unity would be planted.

They decided to live the commandment of reciprocal love so that Jesus would always be spiritually present in their family, according to his promise: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Mt 18:20). With the conviction that, as Chiara Lubich once said, “one of the fruits of Jesus in the midst is giving birth to a community,” they left for Peru.

A few days after arriving, the local bishop visited their town. They introduced themselves as a “Focolare family.” The bishop blessed them and encouraged them to continue in their commitment. They began by touring the periphery of the village by visiting “the poorest of the poor.” They went to people’s houses—if you want to call them that—where they found elderly people who “didn’t even have a decent bed to die in, such was their poverty!” They met many families and children who could afford to eat only once a day. “We would bring them something to eat, hug them, look them in the eye, and give them a word of encouragement,” said Jenny. Sometimes, they would stay two or three days with them, “sharing their pain, their poverty, their brief joys and hopes.”



Hopeful that they could help bring to life a small community in their town, they began to organize meetings of the “Word of Life,” but with no success. They changed tactics several times. “We never got discouraged,” said Javier. “We knew that Jesus has his time and the important thing was to stay in the game.” They invited their neighbors again to meet about the Word of God, and gradually some people joined, including some of the mothers of the children in kindergarten with their daughters. They also organized a children’s program. This felt like the beginning to them, a small calling. Then the parish priest asked them to take on the family catechesis of the village and ten other surrounding villages, including some located two hours away.

Recently welcomed their first visit from the Focolare community of Talara, a city located 650 kilometers and 12 hours by car from Lámud. It was a visit that

marked them in a special way, “a before and after in the life of our community.”

Jenny and Javier share in the joy of those who have found their place in the world. “We are few, but something was born!” they say. “We don’t want to set expectations, but we believe that Jesus has a soft spot in his heart for the Amazon, for the poorest of the poor. This is so perhaps because he was also born among the poor, and he stayed with them. We don’t know the roads he wants to take us, but they’re the only ones on which we want to travel! Like Him, we want to give our lives for our people.” ■

Gustavo E. Clariá

Chiara Lubich’s beatification process: the diocesan phase ends

On 10 November, the diocesan phase of the process of beatification of the founder of the Focolare Movement will end in Frascati (Italy). It will continue in the Vatican, at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The Diocesan phase of the cause of beatification and canonisation of Chiara Lubich will end at St Peter’s Cathedral, Frascati, at 4.30 pm on Sunday 10th November, with the holding of the last session of the Diocesan Inquiry presided over by the Bishop of Frascati, Most Rev. Raffaello Martinelli.

With the definitive closure of this phase, all the documents of the inquiry will be sealed and sent to the Vatican. This follows almost five years of investigations and research into Chiara Lubich’s life, virtues, reputation for holiness and signs thereof.

After this stage, the study of the documents will continue at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The process initiating the cause started on 7th December 2013 - five years after Chiara Lubich’s death - with the presentation of the official request to the Bishop of Frascati by the Focolare Movement. On 27th January 2015, Bishop Martinelli responded to the request by solemnly opening the cause.

On that occasion Pope Francis sent a message in which he recalled the shining example of life of the founder of the Focolare Movement to those who “preserve her precious spiritual heritage.” He also urged the Focolare “to make known to the people of God the life and works of the one who, by accepting the invitation of the Lord, lit up for the Church a new light on the path to unity.” ■

*Focolare Movement Communications Office
Stefania Tanesini*



Mariapoli 2019: thousands of ways to experience something unique

This year once again the Focolare Movement all over the world invited men and women, young and old, people of every background to experience the Mariapolis – whereby a temporary ‘city’ is created which is built on fraternity.

While the settings may be different, the experience is the same: the Mariapolis is the typical expression of the Focolare Movement where those who participate in these gatherings – usually held in the summer – are invited to experience a few days of utopia: a society based on living the reciprocal love of the Gospel.

A very big **European Mariapolis** was held in Fiera di Primiero (Trento - Italy) this summer where the very first Mariapolis took place sixty years earlier. It ran in four stages, each lasting a week. In many other parts of the world the Mariapoli attracted people from very different backgrounds. This year there were 235 Mariapoli around the world with bringing together around 46,000 people. Our editorial team has received letters and reports from Wales, Vietnam, Peru, Canada, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria and Brazil.

In **Turkey** the Mariapolis took place in Şile, a little town on the Black Sea near Istanbul, a resort that provided a holiday atmosphere which everyone appreciated. The 70 participants came from Ankara, Iskenderun, Izmir as well as other countries. The main theme - personal and collective sanctity - was developed by presenting some



Participants at the Mariapolis in Turkey

of Turkey’s best-known saints: St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephrem, St. Helena and St. Thecla whose lives have had a great influence on the Church of the early times.

In Kerrville, Texas (USA), the theme of the Holy Spirit and the Church was explored which has guided the

life of the Focolare Movement all over the world this year. Out of the 350 people present, 100 were participating for the first time in a Mariapolis perhaps because studying the Church was particularly attractive to people at a time that has been marked by so many scandals and sufferings.



Participants at the Mariapolis in Sweden

The same subject, presented with an focus on ecumenism, was at the heart of the Mariapolis in **Sweden** held in Marielund-Stockholm with Lutherans and Catholics taking part. Two Buddhists as well as those who do not profess a specific faith were also present. The participants came from different cities in Sweden and a good representation from Norway. Despite the diversity it was possible to deepen the idea of “the Holy Spirit as the one who is the Church’s vital energy and who gives each person the particular grace to realize their own calling through the unity of all the members of the mystical body of Christ”, in their own words.

The participation of newer generations to the program gave the Mariapolis in Lviv, **Ukraine**, a joyful touch. Young adults, teenagers and children were entrusted with the preparation and running of an entire day which they did in a lively and engaging way. At the start of each day it was the children who “taught” the adults by telling them how they had lived the words of the Gospel of the previous day.

The Mariapolis in Penang, **Malaysia**, was characterized by the diversity of languages, cultures, ethnic backgrounds and people travelling great distances with participants from Singapore, for example, travelling 700 km. “The effort made to keep mutual love alive among us” - they wrote – “and thus give space to the presence

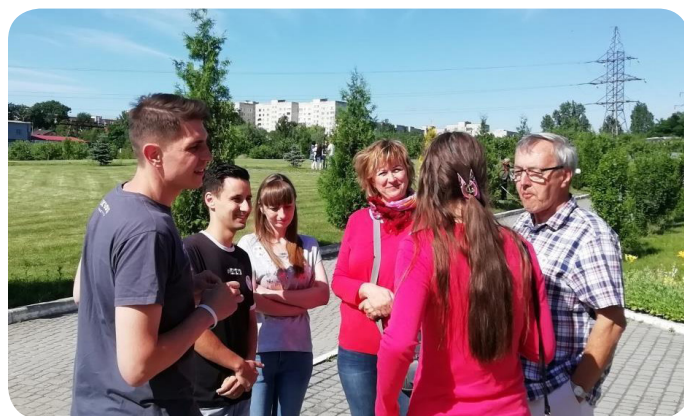
of Jesus in our midst, the commitment to face and overcome difficulties and the willingness to give up one's own ideas, made this undertaking possible”.

The Mariapolis of Boconó in the west of **Venezuela** was intended to offer participants the opportunity to rest, in view of the difficulties of daily life which is exhausting because of extended periods without electricity, interminable queues for fuel and economic hardship. At least twice as many people as were expected responded to this attractive offer – both physically and financially. However, on the first night, a hurricane with hail, rain, trees being uprooted and strong winds caused a power cut that lasted until the end of the Mariapolis which meant that everything collapsed: no water in the bathrooms, no facilities for cooking or no way to keep the food cool. However, through the deepening of spirituality, the invincible love of God became a real, existential experience: they found a way to cook with wood, a neighbour offered the participants their generator and everyone's attention for the needs of others grew. “God is never outdone in generosity,” they wrote at the conclusion of this wonderful experience. ■

Joachim Schwind



Mariapolis in Malaysia and Ukraine



The gospel lived

On the bus

As I got on the bus to return to the city where I study, I realized that the lady sitting next to me was holding a child covered in skin sores. I felt like changing my place, but I tried to overcome my sense of repugnance. The journey was long; we started talking and I got to know that we were both going to the same place. The lady was going there to seek medical care for her child, but she had neither money nor a place where to stay. She had only the name of a contact person and a lot of hope. We arrived at our destination late at night. I felt I could not leave her alone, so I invited her to come with me and share some space in the room I shared with another student. When we arrived at my place I heard her greeting someone. It was the contact person she had to meet.

M.F. – Brazil

Sharing

I was at university for an exam when I saw that an accountant had come looking for a student who had not paid his student fees. Seeing that right then I had

some money in my pocket, I asked that student if I could pay for him. From that moment on, we were friends. Getting to know him better, I learned that he was an orphan who had lost both his parents and looking for some work to pay for university accommodation. I shared his need with other friends, and we committed to helping him both economically and spiritually.

Steve – Burundi





“Go ahead, carry ahead all that Chiara foresaw,”

Trust, openness, gratitude are the words with which the President of the Focolare Movement Maria Voce and the Co-President Jesús Morán summarize the meeting with Pope Francis during the private audience of September 2, 2019. “Bring ahead the prophecies of Chiara” was the encouragement of the Pope.

Maria Voce: We have just come from the audience with the Pope. It was a beautiful meeting – a meeting of extraordinary cordiality. We had brought him a book of Chiara’s link-ups as a gift; he really appreciated it and looked at with care. We also gave him an icon of Mary called “Joy of all the Afflicted”. He loved both the title and the icon itself because he said that it was new to him and that seeing the images of people who were suffering and were going towards Mary reminded him of the last pages of Manzoni’s book where all the lepers in the hospital pray to Mary and invoke her in their affliction.

The whole meeting was marked by great trust, by great openness. He kept saying, “Go ahead, go ahead” – he will have repeated it a thousand times. He thanked us for the good we do and we felt that he was really happy to see us.

He also said, “Pray for me,” and so we assured him that we were praying.

At a certain point I said to him: “Everyone is praying today because the whole Movement knows that we are here with you and everyone is praying for this meeting – not only the Catholics but everyone.” He extended his arms as if to include everyone who prayed. It was very beautiful.

Jesús Morán: Very beautiful. I think it was a meeting marked by mutual love because he kept saying to us, “Thank you for what you are doing – go ahead,” and we

kept saying, “We support what you do; we defend your ideas.” I immediately thought of Chiara’s experience when she went to Paul VI who told her, “Everything is possible here.”

Everything really is possible there. We will have to see concretely but he told us, “Go ahead, carry ahead all that Chiara foresaw,” because then we talked about many things, even practical ones.

Maria Voce: He continued to say how upset he is at seeing there is nationalism, obstacles to peace and conflict even among our own people. He said: “Even in the bosom of the Church (there are) some who think differently. Why do we not learn from history?” “I have cried,” he said, “I cry when I hear certain statements against peace and against mutual understanding.”

Then he told us something that seemed very beautiful. He said that sometimes it’s better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission – that often it is better to make mistakes and then ask for forgiveness.

Jesús Morán: He was very sad because certain conflicts continue to cause death. He said, “Is it possible that we have learnt nothing from the bloody wars we have experienced?” He seemed worried when we talked about Europe. We told him about the European Mariapolis. First of all, we talked about Chiara’s Centenary and he appreciated what we said. He understood that this will not be a commemoration of the past but because we feel that Chiara’s charism is truly relevant today.

Maria Voce: One thing we felt is that he cares deeply about priests, members of religious communities and bishops. He cares in the very sense of saying, “Help us in this”. ■

Cameroon: Life goes on in Fontem

How are things in Fontem? Many people are asking for the latest news from this the first Focolare small town in Africa, in South West Cameroon, an area afflicted by an ongoing armed conflict. Here is a recent letter from Etiènne Kenfack and Margarit Long, the Focolare coordinators for Fontem, who are currently living about 300km south, in Douala.

Dearest friends of Fontem all around the world!

Our thanks for expressing such concern about our situation. Your participation gives us joy, comfort and the courage to carry on.

The socio-political crisis of this region, which has led to acts of violence, remains unresolved. The sound of gunfire has ceased at present, but the situation remains tense.

Life goes on. People are still arriving at our hospital looking for help, even though now we are only able to offer a much reduced service. Over the past few months 1,894 people have come for a consultation. 644 of these were admitted for treatment, including 36 pregnant women who have since given birth.

It's now the rainy season, so we're trying our best to keep up with essential maintenance on the electricity sub-station which supplies power to all the main infrastructure in Fontem. A small group has remained looking after the Mariapolis Centre, and together with others they've formed an amazing team taking care of the grounds in order to prevent the tropical forest from taking over the land.

Recently, to everyone's great joy, Bishop Nkea sent a priest to Fontem once again. This is an unequivocal and tangible sign of the Bishop's care for the Bangwa people. The new priest is in close contact with the local leaders of our Focolare community there, and of course his presence has facilitated participation in the sacraments, especially Sunday and daily Mass. Also in this most recent period, the anniversaries of two Fontem pion-

eers – Pia Fatica and Fides Maciel, both buried in our cemetery – were solemnly commemorated.

We are very concerned about the exploitation of the media for political gain. All too often we've noticed news being circulated which is most definitely incorrect. So we're appealing to you to regard any news about Fontem, including on personal social media platforms, with the greatest responsibility and prudence. Please try to verify the original source of any such news before sharing.

Our own "strategy" in this crisis is to increase the communion and collaboration between everyone who has remained in the little town, in order to achieve joint decision-making. As you can imagine, this is not always easy! It can take time and effort, again and again, to listen to one another really well. However, it's clear to all concerned that this is the only way to go ahead together and continue witnessing to the life Chiara Lubich brought to this land. ■

Etiènne Kenfack and Margarit Long



Training to become “ambassadors of a united world”

At the Mariapolis in Arny, 35km south of Paris, the first “Ambassadors of a United World” course was held from 2–7 September. There were 16 young people from 14 countries who participated.

“Better Together” was the catchphrase that guided them. The programme was sponsored by New Humanity, an international non-profit organisation, which is an offshoot of the Focolare Movement and takes its inspiration from the spirit and values behind it.

The goal was to strengthen the expertise of a group of young change makers, peace builders and community leaders, training them in the culture of unity, peace and fraternity, in order for them to become true “ambassadors” of a united world, capable of being spokespeople for the NGO nationally and internationally.

The 16 who participated were from Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, South Korea, Ecuador, the Philippines, Kenya, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, Spain and the U.S.

“This was New Humanity’s first training course,” said Chantal Grevin, New Humanity’s main delegate at UNESCO in Paris. “It was an effective experience that allowed us, in just one week, to give them the necessary skills to become active workers in our NGO.”

“We talked about what we mean by a ‘united world’, what peace, human rights are, and as a result what we mean by ‘person’”, explained Marco Desalvo, the NGO’s president. “We made an effort to translate all the best practices that our young people promote each day in the world, into a language that can inspire the international institutions, to spread the spirit of universal fraternity in every area of society at every level, just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims.”

The young ambassadors were welcomed by UNESCO officials from the humanities and social sciences (youth branch) and the education sector (global citizenship and culture of peace).

“An open and free dialogue sprang up, allowing these delegates to discover New Humanity’s activities in a better way, through experiences from the young ambassadors, who were able to act as one, seeing all they had learned in recent days and their positive experiences of global citizenship,” added Grevin.

Each young person was given the possibility of personally meeting the UNESCO delegate from their country and express their vision regarding the huge challenges of peace, the environment and fraternity. During the training course, the young people also had the opportunity to meet and speak with Monsignor Follo, a permanent observer to the Holy See, and Marie Claude Machon, Philippe Beaussant and Patrick Gallaud, who are the president, vice president and ex-president respectively of the liaison committee between NGOs and UNESCO.

“Thanks to this course I learned so much about the United Nations system and NGO activities world-



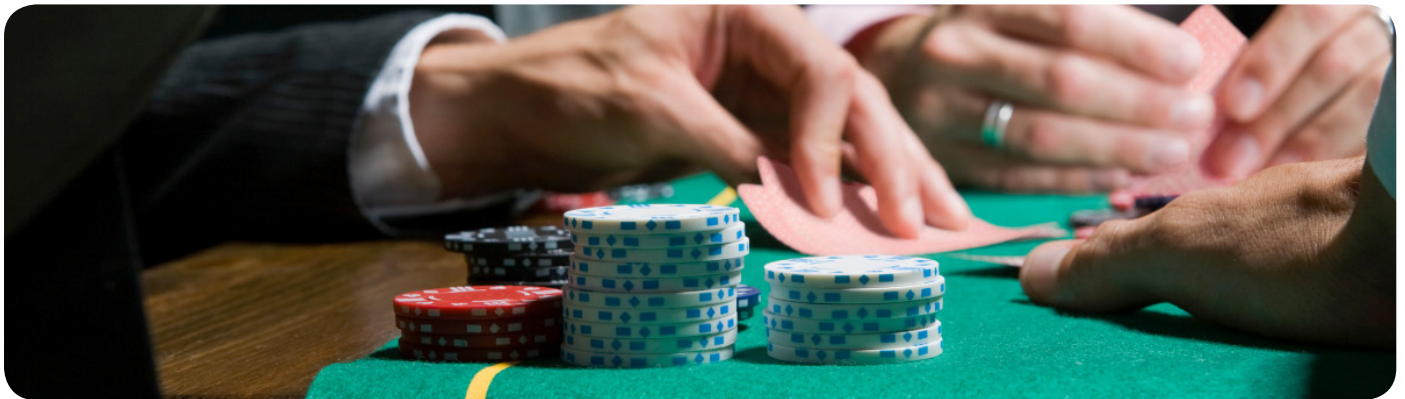
wide”, said Luciana, an Italian lawyer, at the conclusion of the experience. “Yet above all I rediscovered the true motivators that drove me towards this world. As an ambassador of New Humanity, I would like to promote the idea that supporting each other can make a great difference in creating a more united world. I understand that small gestures can have a great impact on people’s wellbeing. This is why I feel so privileged to be a part of this fantastic project!”

Pascal, who is Lebanese, shared: “When I first arrived, I was discouraged at not being able to find solutions for my own country. Then I found courage and hope, and I understood that we can persevere, we can truly work to reach a united world. I know it will happen!”

I am quite happy to be going back to my country and start working.”

And Noè, from Mexico, said: “I arrived here with my friend Josef from the U.S. We live just a few kilometres from the border separating our countries. We are already working together on projects to help migrants. When we go back, we’ll be able to put into practice what we learned here.” ■

Tamara Pastorelli



Philippines: Aiming high, finding God in a way that is both healing and freeing

Beating an addiction to gambling is possible, but not alone. Here’s the story of Christian Rigor from the Philippines, who found God, as well as his life’s deepest meaning, at Fazenda da Esperança.

The idea of “aiming high brings to mind various things: work objectives, personal projects, dreams worth fighting for. They are often all-embracing challenges that we dedicate a good part of our lives to.

Yet there are goals and then there are goals; some have a more subjective value than collective. To reach loftier goals you have to follow a path of growth, put yourself in question, develop a sense of responsibility for the collective and open your horizons to faraway worlds.

Then there are lesser goals that turn us inwards, that close a person within their own self-interest, isolate them and eventually become destructive.

The objectives we choose guide our way of life. Although you can always change which path you’re on. Christian Rigor, a 30-something from the Philippines, knows this well. A peaceful childhood in a well-off family allowed him to study and specialise in Europe. As a teen he had a full social life, but he wanted to make “easy money”, without working for it. His taking things lightly was fatal from the first moment he entered a casino.

Thus began his road to gambling addiction, caught in his need to recover his inevitable losses. It was a dark chapter of his life, aiming for misplaced goals. Along the way he lost friends, work, a fiancé, and the trust of his relatives. He also lost his personal wellbeing, which from the edge of the 24th floor of a building, reached its lowest point. ➔

The turning point came when, encouraged by his mother, he decided to move to Fazenda da Esperança, a project with houses set up throughout a number of countries around the world. In its DNA is the Focolare's spirituality of unity, which inspired its founders. The rehab programme there is dedicated to people who suffer from various forms of dependency.

“During the programme I learned to look beyond myself, beyond my egotistical and superficial worldly desires, and live for a greater goal. I learned to aim high and found God. That's how I learned how to love God and those around me, in everything that I do in the present moment, even when it is painful or difficult.”

At Fazenda da Esperança, life is organised in three dimensions: spiritual, collective, and work. Each provides an opportunity to grow personally. “As a Catholic, I learned to go deeper in my personal relationship with God, to listen to his word and live it, to look for unity with him at Mass and to pray as if speaking with a friend.”

Collective life taught him that to “love God fully, I need to love those around me, to see the presence of Jesus in them.” It trained him to go beyond differences to serve each neighbour – sharing food, listening to friends who were down, taking care of things at home.

At work, whether particularly heavy or just normal, Christian learned to give the best of himself. “I didn't care how difficult, physically taxing, boring, dirty or gross it was.”

Along his road to recovery, he was called upon to be a coordinator for his group. “It was difficult for me to be both gentle and firm, especially during arguments. One time I was unjustly accused of stealing, and I did not feel appreciated. I wanted to give up, but then I decided to stay because I wanted to heal my addiction and be a new person. I dove into loving in each moment, despite others' judgement. I asked God for help and I felt closer to him.”

Today Christian takes on the challenge of his life beyond the protected space of the Fazenda, and when faced with the temptation of gambling, he finds refuge in God. In reality he's discovered that true happiness lies in aiming for other goals. “I realised that I find happiness when I love God, when I feel his presence during prayer, in the people that I meet, in my activities, and when I love in the present moment. To aim high, you don't need to accomplish who knows what; you just need to do everything with love. Today, this is my lifestyle.” ■

Claudia Di Lorenzi

Slovakia: "I became an actress to make you happy"

The story of Doroška and her family.

“An eXtra Something” is a film telling the story of Doroška, a teen from Bratislava, Slovakia. She has Down syndrome, a genetic anomaly. Despite the difficulties this brings, it soon proves to be an “added value” for those around her.



Her mother Viera explains what happens at the heart of a family when they learn they are expecting a child with Down syndrome.

“It was a shock! We didn't expect it and we had

never even seen someone with Down syndrome before. But Doroška looked just like our other four children. We knew that panicking about an unknown situation doesn't help, although keeping a cool head does.

“Yet secretly, somewhere in my soul, I was afraid we would not be able to love her. In the time that followed, extraordinary things began to happen. Many precious people came into our lives, they helped us a lot, and they still help today. And our relationships in the family have become stronger. Our four older children have become more sensitive, loving, and the whole family is united as never before.”

How does feeling surprised change to feeling gifted?
The name Doroška means God's gift. She already had this name during the pregnancy, and we believed that God never gives bad gifts. We just received something

we don't understand yet, and we felt it was a little test of our trust in God. At the time we began to hear many ideas and reflections, in which we sought God's will in the present moment. It helped us a lot, as we clearly felt that this was God's will for us. A friend of ours sent us a note that read, "This is true happiness, because it is built on pain".

How did you decide to share your experience with other families?

Early on a doctor introduced us to other families who had children with Down syndrome. Together we did different therapies, we shared our experiences and eventually established an association called "Up-Down Syndrome". We longed for the children to grow together, so that they were not only attached to their own family, and prepare them so that they can continue together on the road to some independence. We then founded the "Dúhadlo" theatre, which opens new horizons for children through drama therapy.

How did the collaboration with the University of Bratislava begin?

A friend of ours teaches medical ethics at the Faculty of Medicine. Nine years ago she invited me to tell our story to students and get them more acquainted with the Down syndrome diagnosis. I am very grateful to have had this possibility. We felt that young doctors could still be influenced positively, and over the years we have always had positive feedback from students.

"An eXtra Something" is the name of a documentary film that tells the story of Dorotka in her daily life, her joys and struggles. Why this title?

Our original intention was to make a short video for World Down Syndrome Day. Pavol Kadlečík had no experience with Down syndrome and was so amazed that he decided to make a longer film. None of us knew that such a beautiful documentary would eventually be produced.

Down syndrome is a genetic disorder in which the 21st chromosome does not form a pair, instead it forms a triplet. Therefore, this diagnosis can also be called Trisomy 21. This means that these people have one extra chromosome, and often it is called the chromosome of love. There's something extra in them, and they have this special ability of unconditional love.

There is no fiction in this film. It shows the daily life of the main character and her family, classmates, friends from theatre and music, and includes the struggles,

joys, successes and disappointments. It bears witness to the love in this family and their "yes" to life.

Dorotka, did you enjoy shooting a movie about you?

When I was standing in front of the camera, sometimes I was a little anxious, and I had stage-fright. It was hard not to look directly into the camera. But the cameraman was great, and I enjoyed it. Palko made everyone happy with the idea of this film, and I would like to continue with a new one.

What would you say to people reading this interview?

I became an actress to make you happy. Try to love others. ■

Claudia Di Lorenzi





The Economy of Francesco: young people are able to see further

To heal the employment crisis we need a new economy, and to build one we need to give young people space and a voice. More than anyone, they understand what's new and how to carry it out. This is one of the goals of the "Economy of Francis" event to be held in Assisi in 2020.

In May 2019, unemployment went down in Europe. According to Eurostat, it went down to 7.5% in the 19 countries of the Eurozone and to 6.3% in the 28 countries of European Union. This still contrasts with the high cost of youth unemployment, and despite the improvement in the numbers, this still calls for more effective policy. We discussed it with Luigino Bruni, economist at Lumsa University in Rome and scientific director of the committee organising "The Economy of Francesco", an event called for by the pope and dedicated to young economists and entrepreneurs from all over the world, to be held in Assisi from 26–28 March 2020.

What do you think we can expect from this event?

I think there will be great leadership by young people both in thought and practice. They will share their ideas about the world, which they are already changing, concerning the environment, the economy, development, poverty. It will not be a conference, but the start of a process, although one with a slow pace that allows us to think and ask ourselves, for example, in St. Francis' homeland and footsteps, what it means to build a new economy, and who the marginalised of today really are. It will be primarily a moment in which young people draw up a solemn pact with Pope Francis, assuring him of their commitment to change the economy. This will be the heart of the event.

After all, young people have clear ideas about... Young people make things interesting. They are the first to react to changes, because they're the ones who most understand them. There are so many valuable experiences throughout the world in business and

start-ups. Young people think about the economy differently, but the adults – who have the power and university chairs – are not able to listen and give them space. Their thinking is 20 years behind the times, while young people have something to say. In Assisi they will be the ones to speak; the adults will make themselves available to support and listen.

Why haven't the economic recipes that have been put forward to solve the unemployment crisis been working?

The data from Eurostat, the European Union's statistics office, needs to be read with caution: the fact that European unemployment has decreased does not mean that employment has increased. In Italy, for example, there are many people who are no longer searching for work. In addition, people are working less because many contracts are for a smaller number of hours in order to give jobs to more people. Today machines are doing jobs that up until 10 years ago were carried out by people. Robots are our allies, but we need to invent new jobs, because the traditional ones are no longer able to take in enough work. The new tools end up naturally selecting workers, favouring the most competent, since there are less and less people who are able to compete with the machines. This means that less people are working and those who do are the most expert, which creates inequalities. So a social pact is necessary to make sure that everyone has access to paid jobs, creating new types of new jobs.

So we need a new approach?

In just a few short years we have gone through epochal change at an extraordinary pace. But the way we think and the systems we have change much slower, and this contrast is what causes a crisis. So we need to work more at a cultural, scientific and research level, because – as Pope Francis says – the world suffers from a lack of thinking that is appropriate for today. ■

Claudia Di Lorenzi

A hymn to joy

Don Mario Bodega was a priest from northern Italy and spent thirty years in the diocese of Milan ministering as parish priest, spiritual director of a college and chaplain in the Niguarda Hospital. He also lived at the Focolare Centre in Grottaferrata, Rome, and for the last ten years of his life was parish priest of the parish church of Loppiano, one of the Focolare Movement's "little towns."



Thinking about Don Mario Bodega makes you recall Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" for a variety of different reasons. Firstly, joy really was a distinctive characteristic of his, secondly, this piece of music was one of his favourites and thirdly, he often played it on his harmonica. He had learned to play in the seminary and music had been important to him during many phases of his life. As a young hospital chaplain, at Christmas time, he used to go from room to room playing his harmonica. As soon as they heard his first notes, people in the hospital used to say, "Now it really is Christmas." A prisoner in Bollate, near Milan, wrote, "When you played the 'Ode to Joy' for me, I realised that not everyone here comes to make judgements about me – some people just come to love. Thank you for helping me to find God again because I thought he had abandoned me."

Mario Delpini, Archbishop of Milan, also spoke of joy when he announced the news of his death, "Let us accompany this man of God, a priest and friend, to the joy of his meeting with God. A beautiful smile, indicative of deep, personal happiness has been his characteristic throughout life – during the days of his youth and in old age and sickness; when he had many pastoral commitments and during the time when lack of health meant that activity was greatly reduced."

Don Mario was born on 15 September 1942, during the Second World War, in Lecco, in northern Italy. After finishing primary school, he entered the seminary and, through the rector, he got to know the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. He was ordained priest in 1968 and carried out many different ministries during the thirty years he spent in the diocese of Milan. Then, when invited by Cardinal Archbishop Martini, he began to work with the Focolare Movement. During the eleven years he

spent in Grottaferrata, Rome, he deepened his relationship with Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Movement. In the course of his life, he wrote 135 letters to her. In one of her answers, she indicated a Word of Scripture that he could particularly focus on living. It was, "Following his mercy, they have abandoned the vain and false realities." (cf Jonah 2:9) "I Believe in Mercy" is the title of the book he produced. It contains many of his experiences. Bishop Meini of Fiesole gave a copy to all the priests of the diocese on Holy Thursday 2018.

In 2009, Don Mario came to Loppiano as parish priest. There, in addition to creating a deeper communion among the inhabitants, he was a sure guide on the spiritual journey for many people. He played an important role in the "Paths of Light" programme for couples experiencing difficulties in their marriage. He also contributed to the development of the Sophia University Institute. The dean, Professor Piero Coda, wrote, "His house and the San Vito parish church in Loppiano are a stone's throw from our Institute. They became our home and Don Mario's presence and guidance have been a source of light and balm - a school of life. Our Institute also became his home. So much so that, among the most moving reactions to his death, were those shared by our Muslim friends who are part of the 'Wings of Unity' project."

In 2018 he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination. Shortly before as Loppiano was preparing for Pope Francis' visit, Don Mario said that, given his very poor health, he did not think it was appropriate to be introduced to the Holy Father. With great paternal love, the bishop convinced him to change his mind. Don Mario told Pope Francis that he was a parish priest who was sick and walked with difficulty. He said he felt he could no longer work. "If you can't work standing up, work sitting down" was the Pope's response. And that is exactly what he continued to do, with great tenacity and joy, for his remaining 365 days of life. In fact, he died exactly one year later, on 10 May 2019. ■

Anna Lisa Innocenti



The gospel lived

The postman

I had ordered an iron and ironing board that were supposed to arrive in the mail. The postman had only delivered the first, saying that the board did not fit in his car, and telling me that I could pick it up directly at the post office. When I went to the office, an employee there became really angry, telling me that the postman was required to deliver the board as well, perhaps by loading it at the end of his route. The day after, the postman told me that he had received a good telling off and apologised. "No need to mention it further," I told him, "we can stay friends like before!" The next Sunday, during a small party, I received a gift of a paper tree with the Word of Life that month: "Rejoice in the Lord always". Straight away I thought, what if I give it to the postman? I did just that, and the next day I placed

it above the letter slot. When I returned home I found a card with a heart on it and the word "Thanks".

Monica – Switzerland

Members of the Movement, who have concluded their earthly life:

- 12 Sept. Aldo Bullo - focolarino , Mariapoli Romana (Italy)
- 13 Sept. Aleardo De Berti - focolarino priest from Italy
- 15 Sept. Augustin Soares - focolarino priest from Pakistan
- 30 Sept. Pasquale Lo Vetere - married focolarino from Italy
- 03 Oct. Francesca Marchetti Crepald, married focolarina from Italy
- 08 Oct. Achille Colombi - married focolarino from Italy
- 23 Oct. Bruno Beggato - focolarino priest from Italy

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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