

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Here we are with a new edition of Mariapolis, as we continue to celebrate the Christmas Season. Baby Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room for him elsewhere. We wish to welcome him among us today, to be companions along the journey of the neighbours we meet each day.

As we start a new year, it's a good moment to weigh up how we've been living and set ourselves new goals both personally and for our communities. In the linkup of 27 November 2021, one phrase in particular came to light: "slow down". What does this mean for us?

To reduce the intensity of our actions, for sure, and maybe tone them down in some way. In that linkup, Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement, explained it like this, I have to say that for some time now, hearing all that we are experiencing in this period, I have this great desire to say to everyone: let's slow down, let's stop, but not in the sense of standing still, but let's stop to take stock and see how to take care, how to take care of our relationship with God first of all to live a life consistent with the Gospel. Let us think how we can live without always rushing, so that we can listen to people who suffer, who need our help, who need our time.

So, I would really like this invitation to reach everyone, that we can truly say: let's sink down into the present to live this care really well together, together with everyone in the world, because if we do not do this, we will continue to run, run, run, and run and we will miss many opportunities.

In this edition of Mariapolis, as well as the stories, testimonies and life of Focolare communities around the world, we include a gift poster by the artist and sculptor Walter Kostner, encouraging us to care for the environment in the spirit of the "pathways" towards a united world, this year dedicated to "dare to care".

Happy reading, as we all find ways to "slow down" in order to take care of each other and society, and in particular of those who "have no place".

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NEXT APPOINTMENT:

29 JANUARY 2022 AT 20:00 (GMT+1)

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Face to face with the President

The heroism of love in a marriage

“We have to stop pretending to be a happy couple, I want a separation”. These are the words of Virgil’s wife 12 years ago. He would never have imagined their relationship would come to an end. Misunderstandings, insufficient dialogue, a coldness that over time, led to the drastic decision: separation.

There are many challenges that every couple must face, small and big, but sometimes they cannot overcome them alone. And unfortunately, there are many couples in crisis, wounded, facing the pain of separation. The New Families Movement, a branch of Focolare, offers support to accompany couples to help them overcome crises.

In November 2021, New Families organized a worldwide online meeting for the formation of those who accompany couples. Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare, gave this message.

Dear Everyone, here I am, finally face to face with you. I have joyfully followed this well-prepared program, which you have carried out seriously in order to respond to today’s challenges, in a world where the unity of the family is increasingly threatened.

Your participation in this course testifies to the presence of people who still believe in the family and who are therefore ready to give their lives

for it. I sincerely thank you for your availability and for your generous commitment.

As you know, my homeland, the Holy Land, is a land where peace is always under threat. I have experienced first-hand what it means to live in an atmosphere of conflict. At the same time, I grew up in a beautiful family, in which there was a deep harmony and from which I received all those values that made me become the person I am. These two factors lead me to appreciate in a particular way the aims of this course: to consider and help the frailties of the family with greater awareness and with a systematic method.

I think the participation of people from so many countries, from all 5 continents, in this program is very enriching .

I know that in the introduction to the course, Maria and Gianni¹ recalled the words of Chiara Lubich at the inauguration of New Families in 1967², with a special emphasis that I would like to repeat. These are Chiara’s words: “Which families should we prefer, to which should we go out and approach first? Those in which the face of Jesus Forsaken is most striking, those families most threatened by separation or divorce, wherever there are families torn apart that need to be reunited”.

¹ Maria and Gianni Salerno, international coordinators of the New Families Movement.

² Rocca di Papa, 19th July 1967.

It also emerges from the final document of the General Assembly of the Work of Mary, that there is an urgent need to respond to the cry of humanity and of the family that is at its heart. Much has been done by the families of the Movement and certainly it is still a question of continuing with vigour. Indeed, we could say that we are starting a new stage in the journey of New Families, one in which we hope to open up to the reality of the family today in a very real way: the family that is increasingly in crisis due to the exaggerated rhythms of everyday life, rhythms that complicate relationships and lead to the loss of dialogue in a couple and ultimately to separation, where children are the main innocent victims.

With the pandemic, for several reasons, the number of crises has increased for families. There are many examples. You know all about them, certainly even better than I do. This course for accompanying couples in crisis and who are facing separation, confirmed to me how timely Chiara Lubich's call is and how urgent and important it is for families to commit themselves to families. Motivated families, like you, give a strong example; your unity, perhaps hard fought for every day, is an incredible testimony that heals and gives courage, it is a true gift for many other families and in particular for those wounded by the crisis or by separation.

I wanted to tell you an experience that I had when I was in the Holy Land, because while it is important that families help families, sometimes we, focolarini, can also give a hand. I remember that the families with whom we lived in the Holy Land, even if they are beautiful families, there is so much the sense of family there, suffered terribly because of the external situation of conflict, war and hatred. Their children breathed in this atmosphere too. These external causes therefore caused even more crises in couples, and also in their relationships with their children. We often found ourselves listening to these families and trying to encourage them.

I remember that we opened our home, the focolare, to welcome them, for example to invite them to dinner. And I learned this: that for these families it takes time, you can't stand there and say: now I have something else to do, we need to dedicate all the time necessary, with generosity and fully listening.

Often, we didn't have the answers, but simply sharing the pain of those families with whom we were in contact at least gave them a little relief.

We used to think up all kinds of ideas to bring these families, these couples together. For example, if we had some work to do around the house, instead of calling a plumber or someone we didn't know, we would ask the husband of a couple, "Can you fix this thing that has broken down in our house?" Then after his own work, in the evening, he would come. And we thought: even if he breathes this family air in the focolare, it is not enough. Then we would call his wife and say to her, "Can you come later to pick up your husband who doesn't have the car with him?" So she came. But that was not enough, we invited them to dinner, we spent time with them. And on the way home, they talked to each other.

These are small examples to say that surely you too as families can help these families who find themselves in need even more.

Then I wanted to share this with you too.

A few days ago, I took part in a course for married focolarini, married people who want to become part of the focolare. They asked us many questions about the life of the focolare, about the life of a couple, etc. One of the questions was about forgiveness and the Pact of Mercy³. I told them some of my reflections, which I would like to share with you too.

I said, it is easy to say: "We forgive each other and start over", but it can't be taken for granted. The Pact of Mercy and any Pact that is made, is always made between two people:

³ In the early days of the Focolare, Chiara Lubich and her first companions made a "Pact of Mercy" every evening, that is, to try to see each other completely new, forgetting each other's defects and covering everything with love.

I can make it with someone else or with God. And I thought: how do I experience this in my life? If I make a Pact of Mercy, first of all I try to forgive those who have offended me and I try to do all my part; but on the other hand, I don't have to wait for the other to forgive me. It is not that simple.

I remembered that Chiara Lubich always told us that we must love without expecting anything; the love among us must be so pure that it does not even expect to be forgiven but does all its part. And I am really convinced that Christian love is heroic. Speaking to you now, I imagine how heroic this love must be in a couple. Often, even among us, when you feel that you have been offended, judged or misunderstood for something you said or for your way of behaving, sometimes even because of your culture or your character, it is not so simple. I have experienced that it takes time to accept the fact that others did not understand me or were unable to welcome me.

A lesson I have learned from my own experience, is that sometimes you have to know how to wait, because sometimes we want things to...: stop, let's start again, it's all over! But is not so; you have to be patient because each of us needs our own time to go through a forgiveness process.

I have learned that at times we have to stay on the cross, not expect anything and wait for this process within us to work out and ask Jesus to lead the way inside the other too. Then try to talk to one another in sincerity, in freedom and have the courage to say things to one another face to face. I have seen this that facilitates forgiveness, facilitates dialogue and helps reconciliation in times of crisis and conflict. I would like to conclude with this wish from Chiara Lubich, who is committed to living with all of you. "My God, may I be the tangible sacrament of your love in the world: your arms, which embrace and consume all the solitude of the world into love."⁴

Margaret Karram

In the photos: Margaret Karram with the International Secretary of the New Families Movement.



⁴ Trent, 1st September 1949.



Face to face with the Co-President

The key word: inclusion

"New Ways for inclusion in a divided world" was the theme for the Unity Conference 2021, held on November 30. This conference marked the official launching of the **Nuova Global Foundation**, a recently established platform for **New City** magazines and publishing houses, a global network that aims at supporting the media development in spreading the ideal of universal brotherhood and that of a united world. Participants from all over the world attended this conference, held at the Mariapolis Centre in Castel Gandolfo, Italy. The opening speech of Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare Movement, was followed by three round table talks on: new inclusive social economy, global opportunities in promoting human dignity, climate change and social inclusion. Jesús Morán, the Co-President of the Focolare Movement, concluded the conference by the speech which follows.

“I would like to start by thanking especially those who preceded me at the microphone during this event, organised by the Nuova Global Foundation. The themes on global media, transmitting the legacy of a charism, needs and opportunities for dialogue, were dealt with very competently. I was impressed also by the experiences in the various fields of economics and ecology. I think I would be speaking on behalf of many when I express my "wonder" about all this; and I know that this feeling of “wonder” may appear weak,

if one thinks of its meaning in everyday language. But the Greeks considered 'wonder' (thaumas) to be the primordial experience of knowing and communicating the truth. Man in ancient times was dismayed by transience, limitation and finitude of existence, and when he encountered things that lasted, that 'stood above' (episteme), he was full of wonder when he understood that those were the truth.

In spite of the fact that today's man is overwhelmed by a whirlwind of interests, exchanges, social processes, where everything seems to have an expiry date and to have value only when it is useful, he can still experience "wonder" when he discovers and highlights what is; what lasts; what authentically indicates value beyond all utility. So, as a philosopher, let me express my best wishes to Nuova Global Foundation and hope that it would also aim at being an inexhaustible source of "wonder".

Nuova Global Foundation.... Yes, a foundation! Some may think we are crazy to set up a foundation in a world described as “liquid”. It takes guts to lay a foundation at an epoch of liquid modernity, of liquid society, of liquid relationships, when the only concern should be not to take risks. Where does so much courage come from? From the awareness that when times become tough, one has to be more daring. This is what Chiara Lubich when she founded the Focolare Movement at a historical moment marked by the devastation of a world war, the collapse of ideals, and the

loss of hope. She asked herself if there was any ideal that did not risk being buried under the rubble, and she found an answer: God. Around this, a community started to flourish and today, it extends to the furthest reaches and ventures into ambitious projects like this one. It seems that for great things to start, they need the farsighted gaze, full of wonder, of those capable of looking beyond a difficult and gloomy present.

Inclusion is the key word for this initiative and for the New Global Foundation.

It is quite evident that the meaning of inclusion has been subject to change in recent decades. Until a few years ago, inclusion was a moral concern, considered positive insofar as it reduced social marginalisation. Inclusion was the idea behind many educational projects aimed at overcoming all kinds of discrimination. In an era marked by class differences, inclusion was the way to give lower classes the opportunity to enjoy the same social and economic benefits as the upper classes. In other words, inclusion was the way to bring into the mainstream of society those who could not make it on their own.

Today, this meaning of inclusion is not the most decisive one. Inclusion is no longer a possibility given to someone, but a necessity that concerns everyone. Every day, we experience that reality is plural and interconnected, that the principle of global interdependence shows the validity of the condition marked by the principle that 'whatever happens in any corner of the world can have a repercussion in any other place on the planet'. Natural sciences discovered this principle long ago; back in 1962, Edward Lorenz coined the famous saying that 'the slightest flutter of a butterfly in Brazil can cause a hurricane in Texas', on which he based the emerging chaos theory.

Today we realise that hurricanes are neither the first thing nor the only thing to be afraid of. We are experiencing how a virus, that has emerged from who knows where, is producing death, disease and social limitations everywhere. We are discovering how deforestation in one region on the planet is causing incalculable damage to the planet's ecological balance.

We have seen how the loss of fuel from an oil tanker in one area has been the cause of massive marine pollution elsewhere. We have repeatedly experienced how a change in a financial index on a stock exchange located far away can produce redundancies in another part of the world, and so on.

If this series of events describes the condition of interdependence between areas on our planet, it presents itself in the same way, even if proportionally reduced, within any human community. Even our cities are affected by multicultural and multireligious situations. In our cities, too, there are poor and rich neighbourhoods, places where people of certain cultures meet, and spaces where citizens of different traditions and world views live together, often with difficulty. So, interdependence is experienced even in our human communities.

One possible response to this situation is to close yourself in the fortress of your own security and find yourself alone with others like you, to hold back, to erect walls, and prevent people from crossing the borders and meeting one another. This temptation exists and is known by those who are afraid of multicultural encounters and want to solve the challenges of interdependence by denying it. But this is not the temptation of the majority. There is no barrier, no wall, no boundary that can prevent human beings from recognising that they share a common destiny. How often, especially in recent times, have we heard warnings such as 'nobody saves himself alone', 'we are all in the same boat', 'no man is an island!' This is clear, and we are learning the hard way, that we cannot live a happy life if suffering and despair are planted around us. If my destiny is embedded in the destiny of all; if my happiness depends on the happiness of others, then it will depend above all on those who do not have it.

The logical consequence is that without an inclusive attitude, without planned and competent inclusiveness, one gets nowhere. Inclusion, as we understand it, presupposes searching among the interstices of our global society and discovering those intangible realities, that do not even have the strength to represent their own interests or have lost

all hope of seeing their rights recognised. I believe this is a very important point: it is not just a matter of initiatives aimed at including those who are worse off, but also of getting rid of those invisible human conditions that can create negative and uncontrolled processes that influence the equilibrium of every order and level.

Paradoxically, we are at a favourable moment to dream and elaborate an order for society that cultural traditions - from Stoicism to Christianity, from Iusnaturalism to Kantian Enlightenment (to speak only of the West), - have always advocated; each with its own insights. This is now being defined as deeply-rooted and cordial cosmopolitanism (Cf. Cortina, "Cosmopolitan Ethics", 2021) and it could have the following conceptual premises: an inclusive "we" reluctant to polarisation; a civic or social friendship; an inclusive liberal-social economy ("the enterprise of the future will be social or it will not be social"); an ethical journalism at the service of open societies; a cosmopolitan social citizenship; a global governance translated into a kind of democratic cosmopolitan state ("a political project of cosmopolitan democracy that globalises democracy and democratises globalisation"); a new alliance between techno-sciences and humanities (Cf. *Ibid.*) All this is based on respect for peoples' identities and, above all, on cosmopolitan ethics, which means "dialogical ethics of cordial reason", an informal ethics of intersubjectivity that relies on the principles of hospitality and compassion, and on a transnational and global moral conscience. This moral conscience offers special attention to the poor and excluded, comes to terms with human vulnerability and is supported by an ethical education based on human dignity and the dignity of creation. This has been sustained by a long list of scholars for quite some time: from Appiah, Archibugi, Beck, Brock, Cane,

Rawls, to Habermas, Nagel, Held, Nussbaum, Parek, Pogge, Cortina and Sen; and also by the hard work, although obviously limited, of the best NGOs that support integral development and international institutions. (cf. *Ibid.*).

I believe that fostering the realisation of such a project should be part of the Nuova Global Foundation's whole mission. It seems to me that it adheres creatively and effectively to Pope Francis' driving force to promote an antidote against the "throwaway culture", which we can define as the "culture of exclusion". Eradicating poverty and including the least of our brethren in the mainstream of society, exposing hidden conditions and drawing interest to them, discovering situations that are invisible and bringing them for political consideration and decision, are processes that qualify for the humanism launched by Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew, the Iman of Al-Azhar and other religious leaders. Some of the most significant recent events include "The Economy of Francis" and the "Global Compact on Education", to which the Focolare Movement has contributed since their very beginning.

Therefore I would like to conclude my speech hoping that today we have launched a new, long-term process that will be able to encounter the meaningful questions of a humanity that at times is disoriented and lost in social fragmentation. This is an important step towards a more united world, a significant piece of the mosaic that represents the one human family. We do not lack reasons for hope. As A. Cortina says, 'developing a common narrative, a common narrative, is becoming increasingly difficult and necessary'. "Global challenges (climate, pandemic, digital, immigration and poverty) require cosmopolitan responses" (*Ibid.*).

Jesús Morán

More information on the New Global Foundation is available on: www.nuovagloblal.org

Focolare members who participated in person: Juan Esteban Belderrain (Argentina), Susana Nuin (Colombia) and Sister María Inés Ribeiro. Other members of the Focolare participated virtually from their own country.



Catholic Church

Synodality in Latin America

The Ecclesial Assembly was an unprecedented experience for the Church in Latin America. It was an amazing experience which involved the whole People of God in a process that culminated at the end of November. It is ongoing in the effort to implement the priority pastoral guidelines that emerged.

“We lived a true experience of synodality, in mutual listening and in communitarian discernment of what the Spirit wishes to say to his Church. We travelled together, recognizing our multifaceted diversity, but above all what unites us and, in dialogue, our disciples’ hearts looked at the reality that our continent is living with its pains and hopes”.

These are the words of the 885 members of the Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly, which took place from 21st-28th November in a blended virtual and personally present way in Mexico, with representatives from all the countries of the American continent.

Susana Nuin, a Uruguayan focolarina, coordinator of Cebitepal, the Training Agency of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) commented, “On 24th January 2021, Pope Francis opened this first ecclesial assembly, inviting all the Holy People of God to participate: Cardinals, Bishops,

Priests, men and women Religious, Lay People, all generations and all cultures”.

It was a journey that involved all the dioceses, parishes, communities and movements, in a period of “listening”. 70,000 collective or individual responses were received, that will be compiled into a book. The broad lines that were worked on in the various groups derived from this material.

Susanna continued, “In my opinion, the groups offered a very interesting space, due to the commitment and interest of the participants. We worked non-stop for 3 hours at a time, with a great freedom of expression and hunger for change”.

Sandra Ferreira Ribeiro, a Brazilian focolarina, co-responsible for Centro “Uno”, the Focolare’s Secretariat for dialogue between Christians of different Churches, said, “For me it was a real experience of synodality. Every day, in the working groups, there was a different question to be discussed on the basis of the topic that was dealt with in the first part of the day. There were 14 people from different countries, vocations and ages in our group, all connected via zoom. First of all, we listened to everyone’s thoughts, then we tried to prioritize what had emerged and give a summary”.

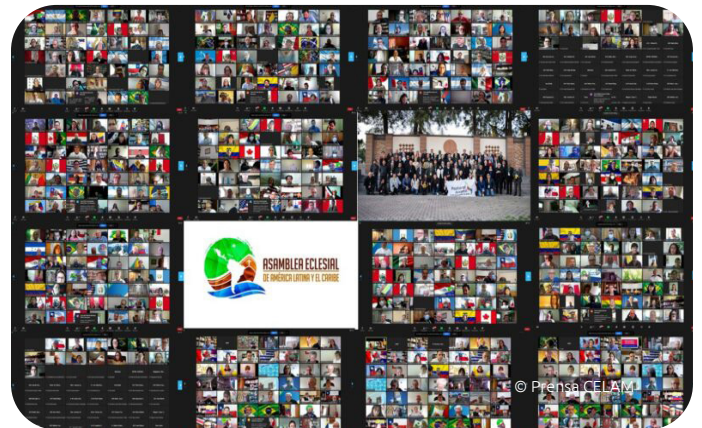
It was an intense and effective process, interspersed with short breaks, which at times were even neglected in order to continue the dialogue and be able to give some personal reflections to the coordinating team. The telematic means allowed a greater participation despite the limit on getting to know each other, that kind of contact that occurs spontaneously in the “corridors”, in the breaks and which also is a part of synodality. The moments of prayer were very well prepared, the Religious had a great hand in this. They expressed the different cultural contributions with symbols and musical expressions always based on the Word.

As in every synodal journey, there was also room for dissent and for the exchange of different points of view. At times these were divergent but they never led to clashes or ruptures.

A conscious decision was made not to produce a final document, because there is still a lot to put into practice from the Aparecida document (2007). Furthermore, this Assembly is only one step on a path that must and will continue. Instead, a message was sent to the whole People of God of Latin America and the Caribbean, expressing the challenges and priority pastoral orientations which had emerged, ranging from a new impetus as an outgoing Church to the leadership of young people; from the promotion of human life, from conception to natural death, to formation in synodality. Challenges that include listening to and being close to the poor, excluded and rejected, with the aim of rediscovering the value of the indigenous peoples, inculturation and interculturality; priority to the implementation of the dreams of “Querida Amazonia”¹ for the defence of life, the land and the original and Afro-descendant cultures. Last but not least, to give careful attention to the victims of abuses that have occurred in the ecclesial context and to work for prevention.

TO DOWNLOAD the final message:

<https://www.cec.org.co/sites/default/files/MENSAJE%20FINAL-Asamblea-Eclesial.pdf>



The guests included Cardinal Marc Ouelet, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, representatives of the regional Bishops’ Conferences. They all followed the proceedings with great interest.

Sandra concluded, “It was a privileged moment in which to be able to meet the Church of Latin America. In my group there were Bishops, Priests, Religious, Lay people. I met the Church in its members, in the people who expressed their anxieties and concerns. It was exciting to see the living, dynamic Latin American Church and its desire to progress fraternity, the Kingdom of God; its desire to truly bring Jesus to everyone “.

Carlos Mana

¹ “Querida Amazonia” is a 2020 post-synodal apostolic exhortation from Pope Francis in response to the Synod of Bishops of the Panamazónica region held in Rome in October 2019.

In dialogue

“Dreams” are built together



A most original approach to the “Fratelli tutti” encyclical unites people with no religious conviction along with believers to reflect on a shared commitment to generating a more open world – and to meet Pope Francis together!

You can see in her eyes, Luciana is deeply moved. It’s Wednesday 24 November, a papal audience has ended, and Luciana has just greeted Pope Francis in person. In his address, the pope spoke of the importance of taking care of our relationships and he showed it when he spent time personally greeting as many people as possible at the audience. Including Luciana and the rather exceptional group she was with. «Dear Pope Francis – they wrote on 30 August 2021 – we are a group of 30 people from different cultures, half of us without a religious affiliation, who meet in spontaneous groups linked by a shared desire to live dialogue inspired by the charisma of unity we draw from Chiara Lubich». Like everyone else, their encounters have been affected by the pandemic and they’ve not been able to meet together as they used to.

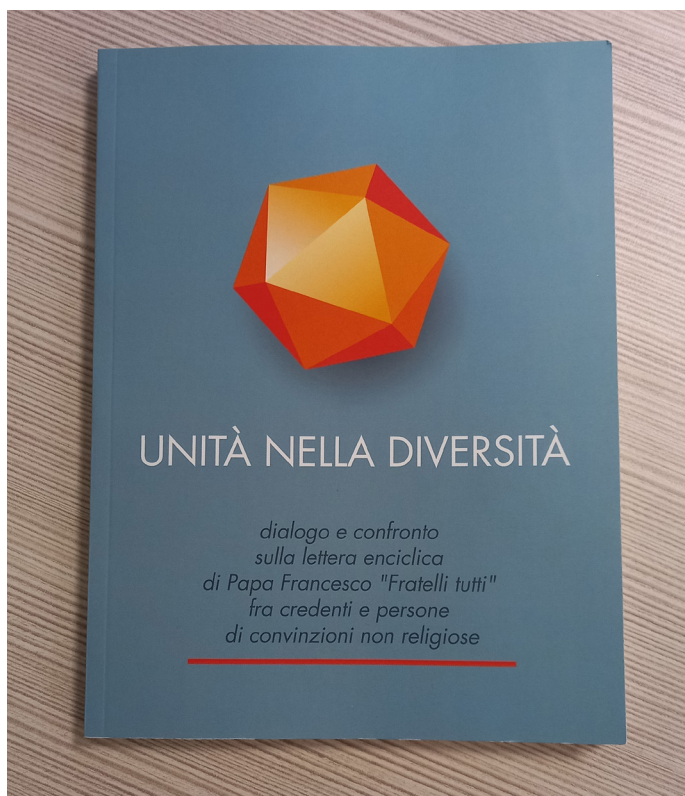
They come from various regions of Italy: Tuscany, Toscana, Umbria, Puglia, Trentino, Lazio, Veneto, Lombardia. «In this difficult time – they explain – “Fratelli tutti” by Pope Francis was published. We hold him in such esteem that many of us were drawn to read it. He himself says that even though it is, of course, inspired by his Christian convictions, it’s written in such a way as to be open to reflection in dialogue with all people of good will. We found it to be a universal document, thought and written for all, ‘all’ in the sense of every person, every woman, every man. And for ‘all’ in the sense of dealing with all the issues raised by the difficult times we’re living

through. And while not shying away from the gravity and dangers, at the same time he indicates a way to put a brake on this crazy race to the point of no return».

It made quite an impact. As well as joining in some of the many online opportunities dedicated to the encyclical involving experts and academics, «we wanted to allow ourselves to be personally challenged by the encyclical, to question where we stand, and what we’re actually doing to contribute to the global aspiration to fraternity the Pope describes in his encyclical».

To do this, they chose their own method: no outside experts, no intermediaries, a fortnightly online meeting concentrating on part of each chapter, sharing what reflections were provoked... «To our great surprise – they confided – we saw unexpected benefits. It all started with one small group, but gradually grew as more and more people were attracted by this approach to a complex document such as this. Some admitted it was the very first time they’d looked at an encyclical». Their style was «all-round dialogue, no preconceptions, active and profound listening to every opinion, with trust and mutual respect, leading to growth and personal enrichment».

The meetings were always lively and the participants found them so interesting, they



decided to record their reflections in a book entitled "Unity in Diversity", a copy of which was, of course, destined for Pope Francis.

In their letter of 30 August, they wrote to him, «Dear Pope Francis, thank you for your

encyclical and for all you're doing for humanity and the Church. We would be delighted to be able to meet and give you personally the fruit of our work, composed of the reflections of all who participated. Those among us who are religious pray for you, those of us who are not, surround you with intense thoughts full of good wishes and gratitude».

The pope replied and accepted their proposal, inviting them to the November audience. There on behalf of the group, Luciana presented him with the book as a kind of open-dialogue with him, and expressed the commitment contained within those pages to be builders of fraternity. In their message to the Pope, they wrote, «Thanks to you, we've been 'contaminated' too in a fruitful way, and we've understood even more deeply that "By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together". We are here to ask for a word to encourage this process to go ahead, and for each one of us – among us you find the pilgrim, the victim, the bandit, the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan – decisively to direct our lives to generate an open world and to built an 'us', a 'we' to inhabit the Earth». A hope for all to share.

Aurora Nicosia

(www.cittanuova.it)



Focolare in the world - World Gen Day

Together for a greater good

The Gen, the young people of the Focolare Movement, aim to reach holiness. They are young people like all the others: with their joys, pains, dreams, difficulties. But they know that such a lofty goal is not achieved overnight. It is built moment by moment and not alone, but together.

This expressed this through testimonies of life, songs and stories on Sunday 19th December 2021, in a World Day during which they met virtually for over two hours.

Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare, greeted them and invited them to build true, profound relationships with everyone, stopping in front of others to meet them in the "here and now".

Let's hear what they had to say, through this selection of experiences of life from the day.

Unity in diversity

The Republic of Indonesia recognizes several official religions: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and traditional beliefs. The largest population is the Muslim one. This diversity makes interreligious dialogue an experience of everyday life.

I am studying for a Masters in Pharmaceutical Sciences. At the university I have many friends from different islands, belonging to different

religions. Some of them are very close to me, they are like my sisters. I am a Catholic Christian, the friend next to me is a Hindu and others are Muslims.

During the month of Ramadan, I often accompany the Muslims to break their fast. Once I invited them to break it together in the Focolare. They felt very much loved. After the meeting, one of them wrote on his Instagram profile: "We don't have the same background, religion, age and we don't even come from the same country, but we have a dream: to build a better home for everyone, to hope and pray for a prosperous future. We long for a universal world, as our country's motto says "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" - "Unity in diversity".

I live in a boarding house where most of the girls are Muslim. At first they were afraid of me, because I seemed very serious and most of them had never lived with non-Muslim people. One day I had a lot of cakes and I thought I could share them with them. The relationship between us is growing. We cook, eat, and play sports and games together. Our experience of living together has broadened our horizon and this makes us happy.

Tika (Indonesia)

Love beyond our strength

My sister studies architecture. She had been dedicating herself to work her degree for three



months, even working through the night. She had to present a project on the city: prepare the presentation documentation and the models. Junior students usually help senior ones, but due to COVID-19, my sister had to do it all by herself. At one point she asked our Mum and I for help. I happily replied: "Okay! I'll help you!" However, I thought: "Really, I have enough to do with my own homework at the moment" and I wondered "Was it a good idea to say I would help her? It's an important assignment for her degree, would I be able to do it right? Wouldn't it be better to have someone who knows the subject?"

However, seeing my sister in need, I thought, "If I finish my homework early, I can help her." So, every evening I wholeheartedly helped her with her project, as if it was mine. In the end she was able to hand in the work, finished on time and was successful. She thanked me very much and was happy that this work was completed not only by her, but with everyone's strength.

It would be a lie to say that when I helped my sister I was always loving one hundred percent, not complaining, but I don't regret doing it, in my heart I felt light and happy. Also, inside me, there was a little joy.

I remembered a phrase from the Gospel that says: "Whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him", and I thought: "Perhaps God has taken up his abode in me?"

Rosa (Korea)

Between war and hope

I study computer engineering. Ever since I was a child, I've tried to live the spirituality of the Focolare. For a while however, I felt far away from Jesus and Mary. I was wondering where God is and why He allows the difficulties that we have here in Syria, such as the lack of electricity, high prices and the difficult economic situation. Also, all of this had an effect on my relationship with others. I recently went to London for a month to visit my sisters and there I took part in a weekend with the Gen, the young people of the Focolare. This experience helped me to find answers and to rediscover myself by living the spirituality of unity. I will never forget the love I found among the Gen, a love that filled my heart ... it was as if we had known each other for a long time. This experience impressed me a lot and as a result I felt that something was beginning to change within me. As soon as I returned to Syria there was also a Gen congress in which I took part.

Due to the difficult situations of the war, it was the first time in 10 years that we were able to meet. It was a rich experience characterized by mutual love and lived as if we were all one family. Inner peace was growing in me day by day. The experiences of the two weekends with the Gen and the people I met, left a mark in my heart and helped me to once again be that positive person who looks forward with courage. There are times when, due to the pressures of life, we lose hope ... as if it is the end of the world and there is nothing left. However, if we experience God, with his grace, He allows us to return to him and we discover that the difficult things we experienced were like our little participation in the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. We realize that our pains are

small in the face of the sufferings he experienced to redeem us.

One thing I want to say is that when we experience painful moments in life, which seem to have no end, they can turn into light, but it is up to us to ask for God's help in prayer. He is always ready to help us and with great hope we can start over and have an ever stronger relationship with him.

Paolo (Aleppo, Syria)



During a meeting with the Gen, inspired by the example of so many around the world, I felt that I had to take a step to get out of my comfort zone. I wanted to "take to the streets" to try to love others as myself. One day we went to Sisak to talk to the Parish Priest about how to go forward with the Romany people and then we visited this family from Petrinja and brought them various basic necessities. We saw how they had used the money we had raised to fix up their living room which is now really cosy! We also brought a laptop so that the children could follow school online. I felt very much at home. There was a lovely family atmosphere. Even though I hadn't done anything concrete for their situation up to that point, I gave what I could: myself with my good will and some of my time. I am grateful to God who gave me this opportunity to love and I want to continue to love because I have found the hundredfold of joy that I want to share with others and now I'm sharing it with you.

Thiana and Peter (Croatia)

Meeting those who suffer most

After the earthquake two years ago in Croatia, we decided to take action by going to the places of the epicentre. When we asked the Parish Priest of Sisak how we could best be of help, he surprised us by asking us to collaborate with him to prepare a group of Romany children for their first communion. We agreed to go every week for a few months to the village of Capranske Poljane, where Muslim and Christian (Orthodox and Catholics) Romany people live. We held catechism classes with sketches and games with them. From this meeting, beautiful relationships began that continue and grow even today.

Through the focolarini we also met and visited a family in Petrinja, in a very difficult situation (both due to the earthquake and the socio-economic reality in which they find themselves). With the aid of the Caritas organization, we were able to buy material and tools both to repair their house and to help them get back to work. They found Hope again!





Readings

An in-depth study on unity

Lately, Città Nuova published the book "L'unità. Uno sguardo dal Paradiso'49 di Chiara Lubich". It is edited by Stefan Tobler and Judith Povilus, and soon it will be published in other languages. This in-depth study, to which many contributed, will help one understand the meaning of unity, the core of the Focolare spirituality.

"Unity is our specific vocation"¹; "So, our ideal is unity and not any other"². Chiara Lubich had a very clear idea about the mission of the Movement she gave life to.

If "unity is the specific characteristic of the Focolare Movement"³, then it is called to question itself on its patrimony and on how to develop it with creativity and faithfulness. How can the Focolare communities, the nuclei, the "Word of Life" groups live unity today? How can they walk bravely and freely on a road that avoids authoritarianism and individualism, and allows full development of personal gifts and the pursuit of common goals? How can they walk along the difficult path of communion, that needs to safeguard its legitimate autonomy and search for identity and acceptance, integration and openness to diversity? This subject concerns the entire Work of Mary, but Chiara Lubich's legacy is much broader: unity concerns the ecclesial

world and also relationships between people of different religions, cultures, nations...

The Work of Mary at the Centre entrusted the Abbà School with a study about all this. The members of the Abbà School, who have worked on this theme for quite some time started from Chiara Lubich's experience during the years 1949-1951. And this is what gave birth to the book "L'unità. Uno sguardo dal Paradiso'49 di Chiara Lubich" .

The book is divided into three parts. "Foundations", the first section offers a general outlook on unity from a biblical, theological and spiritual point of view. Chiara's writings are marked by their profoundness and vividness. They show the divine 'logic' of a God, whose 'interior' 'is not to be thought of as a whole in which differences disappear, but on the contrary: God is One precisely because he is infinite multiplicity', a dynamic reflected in creation. As Chiara wrote, the Father "says 'Love' in infinite tones", to show the extraordinary richness through which He manifests his infinite love.

The second part of the book presents texts from Paradise '49 that highlight fundamental intuitions on unity, thus shedding light on

¹ Unity and Jesus Forsaken, Città Nuova, Rome 1984, p. 26.

² Ibid., p. 43.

³ Ibid., p. 26.



writings or practices that the wear of time or inactive repetition may have rendered incomprehensible or unacceptable. Does the life of unity require the annulling of one's own personality, or does it require the "unreserved gift of self following the logic of God's life that leads one to 'run the risk' of 'losing' one's own life"? What does to live "in the manner of the Trinity" mean? Does unity imply putting everyone on the same level or is it rather the manifestation of plurality? Inexact understanding of expressions such as "losing", "dying", "annulling oneself" that can lead to misunderstandings and derivations are addressed with clarity, and the fruitfulness of a demanding, total love that leads to full self-realisation is highlighted. Chiara affirms "that each one of us has a distinct, unmistakable personality", which is "the word God pronounced when he created us".

Fabio Ciardi

—

The results of sharing

I am a physician who retired three years ago. In the last few years when I was still working, before the pandemic, I served at a vaccination centre. The job kept me very busy. I was quite tired and looking forward to retirement.

The arrival of the pandemic, the establishment of the massive vaccination campaign, and the call for as many forces as necessary (even retired medical and nursing staff), awoke in me a strong urge to take the field again. I committed myself to help stop this wave that was overwhelming us.

I started a vaccination campaign in a large hub. It's engaging work. As a physician, I primarily have to collect people's pre-vaccine history and approve their eligibility for a safe vaccination.

It is a matter of opening my heart, as well as my mind and scientific knowledge, to listen to the person in front of me, understanding them, and accompanying them as they make an informed choice of the best thing to do for their good and that of the community.

I have been able to share many painful situations of personal illnesses, stories and family events, fears,



anxieties, disappointments, ideals and projects upended by the pandemic, deaths of loved ones – but also joy, hope, liberation, encouragement, trust in science and the community.

The expressions I hear are: “Thank you, you have saved us.” “You give us peace.” “I couldn't wait to come and get vaccinated.” “I'm truly moved.” “I'm getting the vaccine not only for me, but for others.”

What one gentleman said in particular showed me all that this service of mine to humanity can be. He told me, “I am a non-believer, but if God exists, I have met him today in you.”

I thanked God for this feedback, especially because I have experienced the power of unity in all that I do, and this witness gives testimony to the Triune God that manifests itself through the “mobile focolare” that I wanted to bring with me.

M.P., Italy

The joy of giving

Knowing that my sister and I were collecting clothes to donate to those in need – together with a group of volunteers from the Focolare Movement – a friend of mine brought me about 20 silk shirts that were in excellent condition and quite beautiful.

When I called my sister to figure out how to distribute them, she let me know that the donations had not stopped yet. Dante, a gentleman who had already helped us in the past, had received other clothes to donate and had immediately thought of us. We decided to send everything to the city of Santa Maria, Argentina.

“I would like to thank the people who donated these

beautiful clothes,” wrote one of the people from Santa Maria who received them. “This is something sacred. As soon as I received them, I arranged everything and created a community wardrobe. I said to myself, ‘Jesus, this is for you’.

“I invited several people, who tried on the clothes. ‘I'll wear this to the meeting’, said one. ‘This one fits me well; I feel like a different person,’ said another.”

It was an experience that made us realise how important it is, along with collecting and distributing things with love, to also find a way to talk about it so that many others can catch the joy of giving too.

María Inés Aiquel

(San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina)

and Margarita Rodríguez

(Santa María, Catamarca, Argentina)

Friederike Koller:

close to people, broad horizons



Always ready, always available, close to everyone and at the same time able to see the global perspective. A Councillor at the International Centre of the Focolare Movement since 2014, she left this earth on 5th December.

These days, being able to confront and contain horizons that continue to expand, is an essential quality for those who hold managerial positions in international organizations that express the great complexity that characterizes this time. Friederike Koller had this ability.

She left us on December 5th, after a sudden illness. She had a rich life, spent mainly in Europe and Africa, but lived alongside many people from all continents. From 2014 to 2020, Friederike, German focolarina, held the role of Councillor at the International Centre of the Focolare Movement. With Ángel Bartol, she was one of the two “Central Delegates”, that is, the closest collaborators of the President and Co-President of the Movement. They carried out an important and delicate task: to work to maintain the unity of the Focolare communities in the world.

A “glocal” assignment, we could say, with ongoing and extremely varied challenges, for which the cultural, social and political diversities demanded a global

vision of entire nations, without however neglecting attention for each person. Friederike was a doctor by profession and, as Peter Forst, a German focolarino said, “She was always concerned with healing, never with inflicting new wounds. She listened, she was patient, she let herself be deeply touched by issues, always putting herself on the line, being close to others, not avoiding conflicts, gaining trust: these were some of her great strengths, along with the certain trust of knowing that she was loved by God”.

Attention for each person and the desire to give one’s life for something great, characterized Friederike’s choices since she was a young girl: first of all, there was music and dance, because, in her own words, they brought her into “a world that does not pass away, that tastes of eternity”. But, with adolescence came the big questions about the meaning of life. A quest that led her to enrol first of all in the Faculty of Philosophy and then to change her field of study: she chose Medicine because through it, she would be able to help many people and perhaps understand the “secret” of life.

A tragic episode then marked a further step towards the discovery of that meaning she was looking for so avidly: the absurd death of a friend, following a serious accident, paradoxically opened up a passage to the presence of God within her and to a first conversation with him. “For the first time”, she said, “that God that I felt was only a “judge” became life, beauty, harmony”. In this way she discovered in him the truth she had so ardently sought.

Friederike’s first contact with the spirituality of the Focolare coincided with the discovery of a “possible” and practicable Gospel. She said, “*My individualistic conception of thinking and doing fell away and slowly I*



began to look at the people around me as true brothers and sisters, trusting in the Father's love for each one".

Life became intense and rich: at work, with young people, helping the poorest. *"Inside, I felt a desire for total donation to God; at the same time I was terribly afraid of losing my freedom".* In that period she learned more about Mary, the mother of Jesus: *"One day I remembered that 'Yes' she had said against all human reason, despite all the fears that she too felt. And so she gave me the courage to say my 'Yes' too".*



After the school for focolarine in Loppiano (Italy), she returned to live in Germany, first in Cologne and then in Solingen. She worked as a doctor for fifteen years, which she later defined as "a school of humanity, of sharing, of humility and of profound respect, in the face of the lives of so many people with unimaginable challenges".

In 2010, the Focolare Movement needed a focolarina to take on the responsibility for Nigeria, in a difficult moment because of the social situation of the country and the increase of terrorist incidents. Friederike, who was then co-responsible for the Focolare in north-western Germany, did not ask others, but offered to go there herself. The focolarine from Nigeria recall, "She truly loved the people of Nigeria, with its enormous geographical, ethnic and religious challenges. She knew how to share our wounds, she followed every situation to the end. She accompanied us and encouraged us to always choose the least".

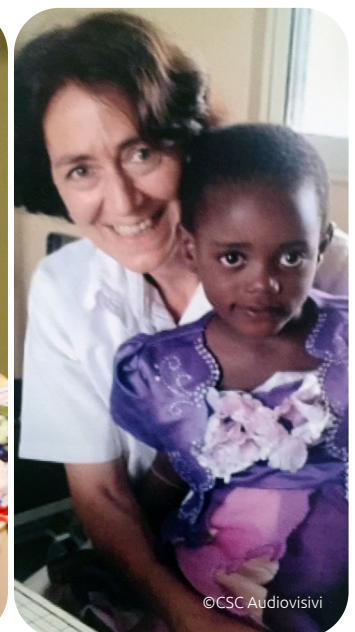
She had a preferential love for those who are discarded, poor, forgotten, combined with an attention to anyone who passed her way and this never changed, even when she held an important position. Every fortnight, with a silent and almost hidden service, she volunteered at the "Centro Astalli" in Rome, which welcomes and accommodates immigrant women. She made dinner and if necessary, helped clean up

the kitchen. Sometimes, a conversation was struck up with the residents of the Centre, and in some cases her experience as a doctor was precious. She would stay up until the last person returned, often late at night. Then, early next morning, she would go back to Rocca di Papa, arriving directly to work at the International Centre of the Focolare.

She also lived the daily life of community with simplicity and naturalness. *"She did everything with great care. With her, it was very difficult to love first, inevitably you always arrived second..."*

For Conleth Burns, a young Irishman who worked with Friederike on the Pathways project, it was a gift to get to know her: *"She was always ready, available, close at hand, able to see the picture in a global perspective. For her, unity was always both: large and small, daily and strategic, personal and social. I think the best way we can remember her is to follow her example and live it fully".*

Anna Lisa Innocenti and Stefania Tanesini





Members of the Movement who have concluded their earthly life:

31 March 2021 **Camillo Cavaliere**
volunteer from Italy

10 April 2021 **Juanita Bajet**
volunteer from the USA

15 June 2021 **Antonio Motta**
volunteer from Brazil

26 July 2021 **Emilio Pastacaldi**
married focolarino from Italy

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

17 October 2021 **Gauce Kely Oliveira da Cruz Gouveia**
married focolarina from Brazil

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

31 October 2021 **Oskar Storm**
focolarino from Germany

3 November 2021 **Florian Frey**
priest focolarino from Austria

10 November 2021 **Giovanni D'Aleseandro**
focolarino from Italy

15 November 2021 **Emilia Farina**
focolarina from Italy

27 November 2021 **Claudio Zorini**
volunteer from Argentina

28 November 2021 **Pietro Lee Keun-Kuk**
married focolarino from Korea

28 November 2021 **Arsen Mihajlovic**
permanent deacon focolarino de Croatia

2 December 2021 **Mons. Aldo Giordano**
bishop from Italy

5 December 2021 **Friederike Koller**
focolarina from Germany

6 dicembre 2021 **Mario Terrile**
priest focolarino from Italy

8 dicembre 2021 **Charles Landreau**
priest focolarino from Italy from France

10 dicembre 2021 **Luigi Sartori**
priest focolarino from Italy

13 December 2021 **Maciek Michniwicz**
married focolarino from Poland

15 December 2021 **Maria Luiza Arrezzi**
focolarina from Brazil

18 December 2021 **Danilo Gioachin**
focolarino 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.

It is possible to send a contribution by bank transfer to the current account in the name of:

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Saints Together

Chiara Lubich: Change to give life to a new world

On 4 March 1989, Chiara Lubich answered questions from the animators of Youth for a United World. In this extract she refers to the care of creation, a new issue at that time and a pressing need for all humanity today.

... the development of science, the development of technology, is something enormous and marvellous which has amazed everyone. ... But it's happened so often without any reference to God.

If we continue like this, our planet could explode from one minute to the next and throw us into a different kind of catastrophe – no longer an atomic disaster but an ecological disaster.

It's almost as if, over these last few decades, human beings have been trampling, crash, crash, through the mud with enormous heavy boots, splashing mud everywhere, throwing into the sky things that don't belong there, and into the rivers things that don't belong there, pouring into the oceans things that don't belong there. They've ruined the trees, ruined nature....

Yet, at the same time, there have been many new discoveries, many wonderful things and great developments. So, there is good mixed with the bad. But they didn't listen to God, they were hidden from God, and now this phenomenon is forcing us to face the situation together, with a united world.

If we don't solve this problem together, we will never solve it.

In other words, everything tends toward unity. Even the negative things make us realize that, yes, universal fraternity is essential, but it has to be in God. Yes, things should be done differently; we have to live on this earth, not blow it up. But we have to remember that God exists.

So, there is this thrust, this turn-around, but it's making everything tend towards unity, forcing us to be one, like the ecological problem, which is forcing us to bring about a different kind of fraternity.

All these events, especially the painful ones, which are more difficult to interpret, should be seen in two ways. In one sense, they are as they are, but something else is involved, too. God's hand is there, God's providence which transforms them and makes them into the fuel for our spiritual life. The cross was needed to redeem us, that suffering was necessary, that cry: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" to save us.

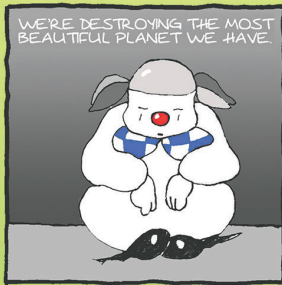
Our suffering is also necessary to create a new world, to change the world, to change people and creation- suffering is needed, it's necessary.

Chiara Lubich

Chiara Lubich, Answers to the questions of the animators of Youth for a United World, Castel Gandolfo, 4 March 1989.

ECO ACTIONS

I'M SAD



I'M SAD TOO



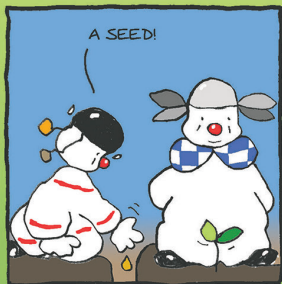
WE DO NOT THINK ABOUT THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US.



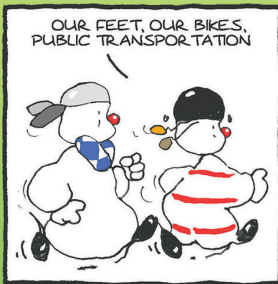
IF WE ARE A FEW AND WE GROW...



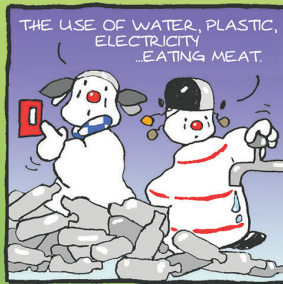
LET'S GROW



LET'S USE



LET'S REDUCE



LET'S NOT WASTE



by Walter Kostner

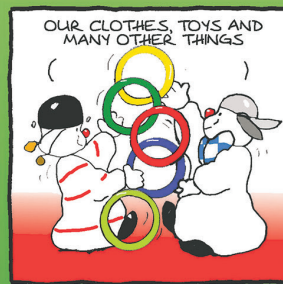
LET'S SEPARATE



LET'S RECYCLE



LET'S SHARE



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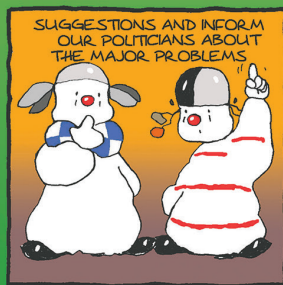
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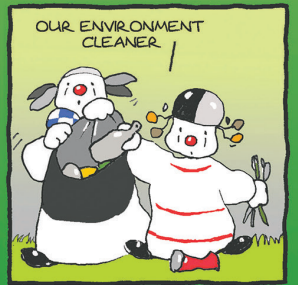
LET'S GET



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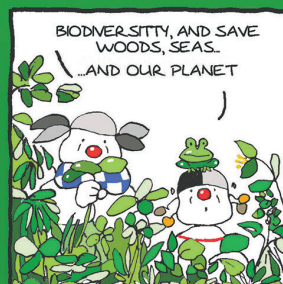
LET'S CHOOSE



LET'S RESPECT



LET'S PROTECT



AND... LET'S SAY THANK YOU

See Bee and W