

MARIAPOLIS

N° 6/2020

NEWSLETTER OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER



CHIARA
LUBICH
1920
2020

It's Christmas

The store windows are all decorated with golden ornaments, small Christmas trees, sales on precious gifts. At night, the streets shine with hanging lights or stars of Bethlehem; the trees lining the sidewalks, their boughs full of red, blue or white lights, create a surreal effect in the boulevards....

There is an atmosphere of expectation. Everyone is touched by it....

Christmas is not just a traditional feast: the birthday of a child born 2005 ago... Christmas is alive! Not only in churches with manger scenes, but among people in this climate of joy, friendship, and goodness that it brings with it each year.

And yet, the world is still overwhelmed by huge problems: poverty to the point of famine, the earthquake victims in Pakistan, dozens of wars, terrorism, hate between cultures, but also among groups and between people....

We need Love. We need Jesus to come back with power.

Baby Jesus is always the immense gift of the Father to humanity, even though not everyone recognizes him.

We have to offer our thanks to the Father also for them. We need to celebrate Christmas and renew our faith in the infant-God who came to save us, to create a new family of brothers and sisters united by love, extended all over the world.

Let's look around us... so that this love may reach everyone, but especially those who are in pain, who are most in need, all those who are alone, poor, small and ill.... May the communion with them of affection and goods make a family shine forth of true brothers and



sisters who celebrate Christmas together and continue even beyond it.

Who can resist the power of love?

In preparing for Christmas, let us display gestures which bring about concrete action. They will be remedies to problems that may seem small, but applied on a vast scale, they can be light and solutions for the serious problems of the world. *Merry Christmas to all of you!*

Chiara Lubich

The conference call video 1804 - December 2005.

Dear Readers,

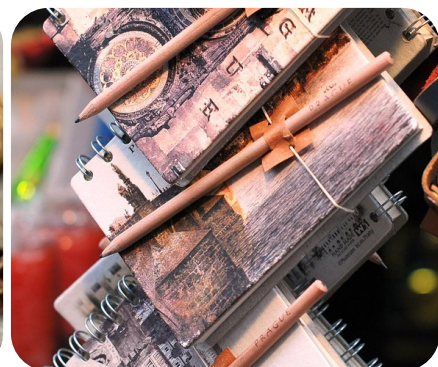
2020 is a Christmas like no other, characterized around the world by the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn highlights many other problems and emergencies for humanity: shortages, conflicts, inequalities ...

At the same time, perhaps like never before, the current situation gives us more insight into what the fact that the son of

God assumed our human condition, with all its limits, actually means. In the baby Jesus, without reserve God exposed himself to all the risks of our life, to all its illnesses and dangers.

This draws such gratitude and humility, encouraging us to take such risks ourselves in living for one another, without reserve.

*Joachim Schwind
Ufficio Comunicazione Focolari*



Four gifts for Christmas

God does not let himself be outdone in generosity and He surprises us with His providence. This is confirmed by the experience of Urs, from Switzerland: a gesture made out of love can have many positive effects.

I was invited to celebrate Christmas Eve with my two brothers and their wives.

I wanted to give each of them a present, but there was no money. So, I placed my wish into God's hands.

A few days ago, our friend Peter, a pastor in the Reformed Church, invited us to his parish community to make candles out of beeswax. It is a tradition in many places here, but I had never been involved. I went with the others to make my candle and, to my surprise, I saw that it was beautiful. I remembered that my younger brother's wife is a candle enthusiast. The first gift was ready!

Every now and then I go and help out in a small company run by my friends, especially when they have to prepare a shipment and are under pressure. The last time I helped, a couple of weeks ago, during a break, I looked in the warehouse among the items they sell and I found a nice box full of notebooks: one a phone book, another a diary, etc ... They were very beautiful. I asked the price, but it was beyond what I could afford. So, I continued preparing the shipment. It was an intense day of work. In the end I was tired, but happy to have lent a hand. When I was leaving, the person in charge gave me a bag thanking me for the

help I had given during the year. I opened the bag and I was almost in tears: it was the box with those notepads. The gift for my older brother was ready!

A few days ago, a friend gave me an envelope with money: He said: "It's for you - for your personal needs". Since it was the day of the Christmas market in our village, I went to have a look, but the prices seemed exaggerated. Before I left, I discovered the stand of a farmer who produced organic vinegar enriched with ginger, just what my older brother's wife likes. It was packaged in a nice little bottle and the money I received was just enough to buy it. Another little gift was ready!

When I got home, a friend tells me that he has received a leather briefcase, which he doesn't need because he already has one and asks me if I could use it. So, I thought about my younger brother, it could be useful as he deals in consultations and estimates. Then I heard from him that, a few days before, his own had broken, so mine arrived just at the right moment!

In the end the presents were ready. A personal note was added to the gift, thanking each person for what they meant to me. It was nice, they were very happy! I thought I would go to the Christmas party empty-handed, but Someone thought to find me a gift for each one.

*collected by Gustavo E. Clariá
Tuesday, December 8, 2020*



Covid: through a common evil we rediscover the common good

Economist Luigino Bruni, one of the experts Pope Francis called to be part of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission is convinced that the lesson of the pandemic will help us rediscover the profound truth connected with the expression “common good”.

Healthcare, education, security – these are the linchpins of any nation which should not be subject to making a profit. Economist Luigino Bruni, one of the experts Pope Francis called to be part of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission (the “Covid-19: Building a Healthier Future” has been created in collaboration with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), is convinced that the lesson of the pandemic will help us rediscover the profound truth connected with the expression “common good”. This is so because, as he believes, everything is fundamentally a common good: politics in its true sense, the economy which looks to humanity before seeking to make a profit. In this new global vision that can be born after the pandemic, the Church, he states, must make itself a “guarantor” of this collective patrimony, in so far as it lies outside the logic of commerce. Bruni’s hope is that this experience, conditioned by a virus that has no boundaries, will help us not forget “the importance of human cooperation and global solidarity”.

You are part of the Vatican COVID 19 Commission, Pope Francis’ response mechanism to an unprecedented virus. What do you personally hope to learn from this experience? In what way do you think society as a whole can be inspired by the work of the Commission?

The most important thing I have learned from this experience is the importance of the principle of precaution for the common good. Absent for the most part in the initial phase of the epidemic, the principle of precaution, one of the pillars of the Church’s social doctrine, tells us something extremely important.

The principle of precaution is lived obsessively on the individual level (it’s enough to think of the insurance companies which seem to be taking over the world), but is completely absent on the collective level, and thus makes 21st century society extremely vulnerable. This is why those countries which have preserved a bit of a welfare state have demonstrated themselves a lot stronger than those governed entirely by the market. And then the common good: since a common evil has revealed to us what the common good is, so has the pandemic forced us to see that the common good requires community, and not only the market. Health, safety, and education cannot be left to the game of profit.

Pope Francis asked the COVID 19 Commission to prepare the future instead of prepare for it. What should be the role of the Catholic Church as an institution in this endeavor?

The Catholic Church is one of the few (if not the only) institution that guarantees and safeguards the global common good. Having no private interests, it can pursue the good of all. It is because of this that she has a vast hearing. For the same reason, she has a responsibility to exercise it on a global scale.

What personal lessons (if any) have you derived from the experience of the pandemic? What concrete changes do you hope to see after this crisis both personally and globally?

The first lesson is the value of relational goods. Not being able to exchange hugs in these months, I have rediscovered the value of an embrace and of contact. Secondly, we can and must have many online meetings and working remotely, but for important decisions and for decisive meetings, the internet does not suffice. Physical presence is necessary. So, the virtual boom is making us discover the importance of flesh and blood contact and the intelligence of the human body. I hope

that we do not forget the lessons learned in these months (because people forget very quickly), in particular the importance of politics as we have rediscovered in these months (as the art of the common good against a common evil), and that we do not forget the importance of human cooperation and global solidarity.

Preparing for the post-Covid world includes forming future generations, who will be forced to make decisions that forge new paths. In this sense, can education be considered only as a “cost” to reduce, even in times of crisis?

Education, above all that of children and young people, is much more than an “expense”... It is a collective investment with the highest rate of social return. I hope that in those countries where schools are still closed, a national holiday will be designated when they are reopened. Democracy begins at the school desk and there it is born again in each generation. The first heritage (patres munus) that we pass on through the generations is that of education.

Tens of millions of children around the world do not have access to education. Can article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be ignored, which affirms that everyone has the right to free and mandatory education, at least regarding elementary education?

Clearly this must not be ignored, but we cannot ask that the cost of education be entirely sustained by countries without sufficient resources. We must quickly give life to a new international cooperation under the slogan: “educating children and adolescents is a global common good”, where countries with more resources help those with fewer resources so that the right to free education becomes real. This pandemic has shown us that the world is a large community. We must transform this common evil into new common, global goods.

Educational budgets have undergone sometimes drastic cuts even in rich countries. Could there really be a desire not to invest in future generations?

If economic logic takes over, reasoning such as this will increase: “Why should I do something for future generations? What have they done for me?” If we do not do it, the commercial mantra, becomes the new logic of nations, we will always invest less in education, and we will always create more debt which today’s children will pay off. We must become generous once again and cultivate non-economic virtues such as compassion, meekness, and generosity.



Though it finds itself in economic difficulty, the Catholic Church is on the front lines offering education to the poorest. As we’ve seen during this pandemic, lockdowns have had a considerable impact on Catholic schools. But the Church continues to welcome everyone, without distinctions based on creed, making space for encounter and dialogue. How important is this aspect?

The Church has always been an institution for the common good. Luke’s parable does not tell us about the faith of the half-dead man who the Good Samaritan assisted. It is precisely during the gravest crises that the Church rediscovers her vocation as Mater et magister (Mother and teacher), that the esteem of non-Christians grows toward her, that the sea that gathers everything in, then gives everything to everyone, above all to the poorest. The Church has always known, after all, that the indicator of every common good is the condition of the poorest.

What contribution can education about religion and religions offer young people, especially in a world increasingly driven by divisions and which fosters the engagement of fear and tension?

That depends on how they are taught. The ethical dimension which exists in every religion is not enough. The main teaching that religions can offer today regards the interior life and spirituality, because our generation, in the space of just a few decades, has squandered a thousand-year-old heritage which contained ancient wisdom and popular piety. The world’s religions must help the young and everyone else to rewrite a new “grammar” of the interior life. If they do not do that, depression will become the plague of the 21st century.

*Source: Vatican News
Saturday, November 7, 2020*



#daretocare in Vietnam: **working together for universal brotherhood**

The commitment of the young people of the Ho Chi Minh City Focolare Movement in Vietnam for people in difficulty: to take care of their needs by distributing 300 parcels of goods to families and 370 small gifts for children.

In July 2020, some gen2 and youths of the Focolare in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam wanted to do something concrete for #daretocare – the focolare youth Campaign to “take responsibility” for our society and the planet -, to help people in the community who are in need. They chose to go and share their love to Cu M’gar district, Dak Lak province. It is a place with the widest coffee area and the people come from another ethnic group. It’s 8 hours’ drive from HCMC.

“We started to pack and sell fruits, yogurt, and sweet potatoes online. We collected used clothes for adults and kids, we received some donations and at a certain point the restrictions for COVID19 was over so we were able to sell goods as “fundraising” at the parish. During the preparation, it was a big challenge for us to see things together, misunderstanding and disagreements were not lacking. But knowing that there will be 300 families who are waiting for us we continue to go ahead with love, patience and a little of sacrifice.

On the 17 – 18 October with 30 energetic and enthusiastic youths, we made a meaningful trip. We were able to distribute 300 parcels of goods to the families and 370 small gifts for the kids. During the trip, we realized how lucky and happy we are compared to the situations of these families. We shared what we have brought to show our love but at the end we



received more LOVE through their smiles... In fact, every time we approach them it seemed like we have known each other for a long time.

During the trip some of the youths brought their friends. We found ourselves being together from different parts of Vietnam. There was a joy to know each one, to laugh and to work together like brothers and sisters without any distinctions.

Thank you for this project #daretocare, a good excuse to work together and build this fraternal brotherhood among us”.

*Gen and youth of the
Focolare Movement in Vietnam
Wednesday, November 11, 2020*



Education, a matter of love

The Global Compact on Education, suggested by Pope Francis, invites all people to adhere to a Pact. This was discussed this with Silvia Cataldi, a sociologist and professor, who lectures at La Sapienza University, Rome.

The protagonists are the ones who hope in a world of more justice, solidarity and peace. The Global Compact on Education, suggested by Pope Francis, speaks of youth as being, at the same time, both beneficiaries and agents in the field of education. Together with their “families, communities, schools, universities, institutions, religions and government” they are called “to subscribe to a global pact on education” and to commit themselves to a more fraternal and peaceful humanity. This was discussed during the meeting entitled “Together to look beyond”, held at the Pontifical Lateran University, in Rome on October 15. In a video message, the Holy Father urged all people of good will to adhere to the Pact. Silvia Cataldi, sociologist and professor at La Sapienza University in Rome commented on the Pope’s words.

In recent years we have noticed the youth’s sturdy protagonism where important current affairs are concerned. The educational model that sees them as passive subjects seems to be obsolete...

“Often, educational models limit themselves to think of culture as a concept. The pedagogist Paulo Freire speaks of the “banking model of education”, where knowledge can be poured or deposited as if in a container. However, this knowledge has two risks: that of remaining abstract and detached from life, and that of assuming a hierarchical vision of knowledge. With respect to this, the Pact strikes me as an educator, because it invites us to listen to the cry of the younger generations, to let ourselves be questioned by their questions. We must realize that education is a participatory path, and not a unidirectional one”.

So, what does to educate mean?

“The term culture stems from colere and it means to cultivate, a verb which indicates that one needs to dedicate time and space, by starting from questions and not from providing answers. But it also means to take care, to love. This is why I am so impressed by the Pact, because it strongly affirms that “education is above all a matter of love”. When we speak of love we think of the heart, of feelings. But love has an eminently practical dimension, it requires hands. So, we educators do our work only if we manage to understand that education is care. Daily care is revolutionary because it is an element of criticism and of transformation of the world. Hannah Arendt explains this well when she says that “Education decides whether we love the world enough because it leads to its transformation”.

How can we make sure that the Pact does not remain just an appeal?

The call to universal brotherhood – the core of the Pact – has important implications, but to have a transforming power it must promote a change of perspective that leads one to welcome diversity and heal inequalities. The French sociologist Alain Caillé says that “fraternity is plural”, and this means that if in the past brotherhood was only among peers, relatives, in a class or in a group, today it requires recognition of “the specificity, beauty, and uniqueness” of each one. Moreover, if we are all brothers, then our way of conceiving reality changes, because we look at it from a specific perspective, which is that of the least ones, and we are pushed to act, as for example, to protect the fundamental rights of children, women, the elderly, the disabled and the oppressed”.

*Claudia Di Lorenzi
Friday, November 13, 2020*



Sherin Helmi: **everyday ecumenism**

Insights by Sherin, a focolarina of the Coptic Orthodox Church, drawing from her daily experience of how unity among Christians from different Churches is possible.

The Church of tomorrow will follow “the example of the Most Holy Trinity, where there will be unity in one truth, and variety in all traditions; they will be different aspects of the same truth”. This is how Chiara Lubich described the ecumenical journey towards unity among Christian Churches in her book *Una spiritualità per l’unità dei cristiani. Pensieri scelti* (A Spirituality for the Unity of Christians. A selection of writings), edited by Città Nuova. Focolarina Sherin, a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church living in Cairo, Egypt, agrees with Chiara, adding that it’s possible to experience unity among Christians of different Churches in our daily lives.

What was it about the spirituality of unity that struck you when you met Chiara and the Focolare Movement?
 “I discovered that the Gospel, lived by a people with a new lifestyle, language and culture, is leaven for a new humanity. I learned universal fraternity and our own lives are not in separate compartments. And one can live one’s faith 24 hours a day, allowing Jesus to transform us, to become another Him, so He Himself can live among His people, as He promised in the Gospel”.

You are a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Has joining the Focolare Movement, founded by a Catholic woman and largely Catholic in its membership, created a sense of distance from your own Church?

“Certainly not! Maybe God prepares us. I went to a school run by Catholic nuns where there was such respect and love that I never felt any conflict in belonging to another Church. When I met the Movement, the experience was even deeper, and my heart opened up to the whole Church. It prompted me to go deeper in my understanding of my own Coptic Church, to discover similarities in it with the life I found in the Focolare. I discovered, for example, that St Anthony the Great invites all Christians, as brothers

and sisters “to become one soul with one will and one shared faith”. So as time passed, I felt I wanted to commit myself to live for the unity of the human family. I feel such gratitude to Chiara”.

You live your daily life in community with other Focolarine who are Catholic. What does building unity with them mean for you?

“It means never being afraid to face up to any differences, because they are always an opportunity to love, believing that this actually builds unity and allows us to experience the presence of Jesus among us. It’s the same for people with different ethnic backgrounds, social provenance, politic beliefs, and so on. If we think we’re all children of God the Father, then every other person is a brother or sister to love”.

For the Coptic Orthodox Pope, His Holiness Tawadros II, the journey towards communion among the Churches is centred on Christ. The “ways” leading to Him are dialogue, study, prayer, relationship. In practical terms, what does it mean to seek unity in these areas?

“In the Focolare Movement ecumenical dialogue is understood as a “dialogue of life”, in which we try to love one another reciprocally in our daily life as Jesus did. Then through dialogue we can discuss themes of faith, focussing on finding what unites us. The Coptic Orthodox Church gives great importance to prayer and fasting. So we pray together because unity is a gift only God can give. And we practice fasting for the soul to transcend the material level and so get spiritually closer to God. Within the Movement there is also a group of academics who together look into many different subjects, each one from the perspective of their own Church. Their approach is one of mutual love, listening, welcome and respect. They pray to perceive and discern how God may view things”.

*Claudia Di Lorenzi
 Tuesday, November 3, 2020*



The great witness this pandemic is calling us to offer humanity

In recent months the communion of goods has developed even more among the Focolare communities around the world, responding to many requests for help.

The extraordinary communion of goods for the Covid-19 emergency is once again helping us to experience the reality of “always being family” which knows no boundaries or differences but builds universal brotherhood as endorsed by Pope Francis in his latest encyclical “Fratelli tutti”.

This communion is developed through very real “fioretti” (“little flowers”) or acts of love and reminds us of the experience of the first Christians: knowing they were of one heart and one soul, they put all their goods in common, bearing witness to God’s superabundant love and bringing hope.

During these months of pandemic, the communion of goods has grown even stronger between various communities of the Focolare Movement around the world, in response to many requests for help.

In Asia, Taiwan and Japan, the Gen who are the young people of the Focolare started a fundraiser to help the community in the city of Torreón, Mexico.

Ròisin, a Gen from Taiwan immediately felt the urge to act when she heard how the Mexican Gen were helping poor families affected by the virus. Together with other Gen in her city she launched an appeal to the entire Focolare community in Taiwan who immediately joined the initiative by raising funds for their friends in Mexico. Subsequently, the Gen of Japan also joined the initiative.

In Tanzania, one of the families in the community was

without light because the battery of the small solar system had stopped working. “Some time before,” the local community wrote, “one of us had received a grant of 50 Euros, about 120,000 Tanzanian shellini, for a family in difficulty. We talked about it together and decided to give the money which covered about 60% of the cost. The family was able to buy a new battery with the money and get light back into the house. After a few days, a donation of 1,000,000,000 Tanzanian shellini arrived for the needs of the focolare: almost 10 times as much...the hundredfold!!!”.



In Portugal, after hearing about the global situation from the International Focolare Centre, the local community decided to broaden its horizons beyond its borders. “The money we have collected so far – they write to us – is the result of small sacrifices as well as larger sums of money that we had not expected to receive. We see that there is a growing awareness of communion in everyone’s daily life: together we can try to not only overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic but also create a way of life”.

In Ecuador, J.V. managed to involve lots of people in the culture of giving. It all started with “a phone call to

a colleague to hear how he was,” he says, “and to share his concerns about his family and the people in his village who had no food. He opened a Facebook page and started sending e-mails to publicize the precarious situation in this village. This prompted an incredibly generous response not only from the inhabitants of his neighbourhood but also from further afield. The colleague’s friends and family can now buy food and even help others whose needs are even greater than theirs.

In Egypt everything is closed because of the lockdown, including the work of the “United World” foundation which transmits the culture of “universal brotherhood” through development projects supporting people living in fragile social situations. They asked themselves what they could do and where they could help. And so, in spite of the lockdown and “through the communities of various churches, mosques and other social organizations, we have been able to help an even larger number of people: families from the

poorest districts of Cairo, widows, orphans, people on their own and elderly people, refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, North and South Sudan. At the moment we are able to prepare 700 packages of essential foodstuffs. Our goal is to reach 1,000 packages”.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Gen of Kinshasa started a communion of goods which consisted of setting up a fund to help those most in need. Nine families have received soap, sugar, rice and face masks.

These experiences are about more than just providing financial help. As Ròisin from Taiwan said, “even the darkest times can be enlightened by love and solidarity, and even if we are isolated from one another, we are closer to achieving a united world”.

Lorenzo Russo

Thursday, November 5, 2020

Gospel lived: **travelling companions**

The art of teaching

During the pandemic, like many of my colleagues, I started giving lessons online. In the beginning it was a novelty so there was a high level of participation among the children but with time some of the craftier ones found ways to do something else and slowly lost interest in the lessons. Faced with such a variety of responses to my commitment to them, I tried not to show preference or approval but tried to highlight the importance of taking personal responsibility which was certainly more difficult in those times of crisis. The real dilemma, however, was when I had to pass judgment because it was clear to me that the written work they sent me lacked originality and was probably copied. One day I asked the pupils how they would act in my place. It was an opportunity for them to really reflect on their own participation or non-participation. And what really moved me was that they made their own judgment. I don’t think I have ever experienced a life lesson like it before.

(G.P. – Slovenia)



(taken from Il Vangelo del Giorno, Città Nuova, year VI, no.5, September-October 2020) Thursday, October 29, 2020



Fifty years of peacebuilding and witness

On the 50th anniversary of Religions for Peace, we take a look at what progress has been made and visions for the future with Azza Karram, recently elected Secretary General.

Azza Karram was elected Secretary General of Religions for Peace in August 2019. Born in Egypt, a Dutch citizen, professor of religious studies and diplomacy, former UN official, her soul has a universal dimension, and she now leads a movement made up of more than 900 religious leaders from 90 different countries, committed with her to making peace a place of encounter and a journey to be travelled together as a community. Religions for Peace held its first assembly in 1970 between 16 and 21 August. It was led by the great Japanese visionary Nikkyo Niwano, founder of the Rissho Kosei-kai. In the 1990s he also involved Chiara Lubich in this world assembly. He saw in her a unique spiritual and pragmatic consonance. This year Religions for Peace celebrates its 50th anniversary. We got in touch with Azza Karram in New York to ask her what progress has been made and to share her vision for the future.

It's been 50 years since Religions for Peace was founded, what do you see as the movement's mission and what message is the movement giving today?

After 50 years of life, we have seen how necessary it is for religions to work together, regardless of institutional, geographical or doctrinal differences. This is the message we give even if we have not yet realized it perfectly because we know that there is a process of continuous learning and the fatigue of working together. Covid has further emphasized the need to work together. Religious communities and NGOs inspired by religious values are already doing so because they were the first to respond to this

humanitarian crisis. It is true that health institutions have also intervened but they would not have been able to do so properly without the religious institutions which have not only offered a medical, financial and psychological response to the crisis but have also been able to see the spiritual needs of a community and are responding fully on all fronts. And yet, how many of these religious institutions, while responding to the needs of the one same community, are working together? Very few and not for lack of exigencies, expertise or knowledge. Sometimes I suspect that we are really trying to save our institutions, and working together in this complex time requires even more effort and commitment because it is easier to be concerned about the sanctity and cohesion of our groups than to be open to a universal commitment. Instead, Covid is forcing us to act differently. We wanted to launch a multi-religious humanitarian fund precisely to show that responding to a need together means having the intention and will to build a common future which does and will bring about abundant fruits: we know this from our history and we want to continue to show how fruitful inter-religious collaboration is.

What challenges does Religions for Peace face?

I think the challenges Religions for Peace faces are the same as those faced by all institutions, not just religious, but political, institutional, judicial and financial in terms of trust, efficiency, legitimacy and competences. In my opinion religious institutions have been suffering from these crises for a long time and will continue to suffer from them longer than civil institutions. Back again to the pandemic. Blocks and closures have created an institutional breakdown in our communities. We all understand what it is like not to be able to meet together anymore which is one of the basic and fundamental functions of our

experiences. Instead, these functions are under threat for churches, temples, mosques and synagogues that used to welcome hundreds or thousands of people but are now restricted to 50 or a few dozen. Not being able to meet together in person has meant having to restructure our religious services which we have done but how much is this affecting religious practice? Not only the members of these communities but also those who lead them are having to redefine their role and how they carry it out in the world. So, if I am already struggling to survive as an institution, how can I work with others who are experiencing the same difficulties in other parts of the world? All of us are challenged to think differently – the United Nations, governments and we too as religions. And then the very existence of faiths is threatened in countries and societies where authoritarianism does not allow the practice of faith and where the regimes feel their intrinsic fragility to be threatened by the voices that speak out for human rights, justice and multilateralism.

To respond to these challenges we need to work together more closely, we need financial resources and dare I say we also need greater political awareness of the social role that multi-religious collaborations play which should also be supported economically because they provide spaces of service, meeting and unique resources for the growth of a society. Instead, I see that faiths are often on the margins and if they do work together they are generally the last to be considered in governments' plans.

You cited collaboration as a fundamental pillar of inter-religious experience. We know that Religions for Peace has been collaborating with the Focolare movement for a long time. How do you see this work continuing and how can it be implemented?

It has been a long-standing collaboration that began in 1982 and saw Chiara Lubich elected as one of the honorary presidents of Religions for Peace in 1994 and now Maria Voce has been one of our co-presidents since 2013. When I started my term of office, I promised myself that I would honor all those who have gone before me and who have allowed Religions for Peace to be what it is and so this also includes Chiara. I really need to find a space, also on our website, to talk about this friendship. The thing that strikes me most about our bond, both in the past and now, is that it has always been a vital, living collaboration formed by the people. The fact that someone from the Focolare is still responsible for communications at Religions for Peace is a fruit of this inheritance, and over the years, members of the focolare have served our movement in the most varied ways as has the Rissho Kosei-kai.



These inter-religious collaborations where human resources are shared, images of the living divine that honor the sacred space of dialogue with their presence, are for me a sign of reciprocity towards God because through working together in inter-religious dialogue we are serving Him and showing everyone the beauty of having created us of so many religions.

How do you see the future for Religions for Peace?

I imagine it under the banner of multilateralism. Just as the United Nations is the multilateralism of governments, I see our movement as the multilateralism of religions. We are, after all, committed as human beings at a micro and macro level to preserving the diversity willed by the Creator and saving it for all, including the institutions. I imagine the benefits that institutions might derive from this vision and from our work, and if we work together we will all flourish. If political institutions are only interested in saving themselves and if religious bodies are only interested in saving themselves, this will not only lead to the destruction of our groups but of the whole planet. Instead, the Pope himself, first with the *Laudate Si* and now with his new encyclical, which was the result of a document he wrote with the highest Sunni leader, is calling us, is a call to all of us to safeguard the earth, but above all a call for the inclusive, human fraternity of all religions. We support this encyclical and this call to fraternity excludes no one, not even those without faith, and we will fight to really make it the patrimony of all religions.

*Edited by Maddalena Maltese
Tuesday, November 24, 2020*



Brazil: an online exhibition about Chiara Lubich

Originally planned as part of the centenary year of Chiara Lubich's birth, this event was postponed due to the pandemic, and the funds raised distributed to people in need. It's now being launched on social media by the Focolare Movement in Brazil, with the original content but communicated in a completely new way.

The physical exhibition was originally scheduled for August 2020, then shifted to November and finally arrived at its destination on the web. Dedicated to Chiara Lubich to mark the centenary year of her birth, the exhibition is now accessible through Focolare Brazil @focolaresbrasil (Facebook, Instagram e Youtube). Photos, videos and articles will be published daily throughout the month of November 2020. It's even better than originally planned, because it's open to a wider public online and it's been enriched by the contributions of an intergenerational team. We spoke with Josè Portella, one of the exhibition curators.

How did you decide to replace the physical show with a virtual one? Who is part of the team and tell us something of how you've worked together?

There are 16 of us in the team, young and older, all members of the Focolare Movement in different vocations: youth, Volunteers of God and Focolarini. We've been working together since early 2019 to curate a version for Brazil of the original Chiara Lubich centenary exhibition launched in the Gallerie in Trento, Italy. When Covid-19 took hold, we realized that the most important way for us to "celebrate" Chiara's centenary was to help those suffering from the effects of the pandemic. So, in agreement with the benefactors who had already donated money to fund the exhibition, we distributed all we had received to those in immediate need. After we had decided to



do this, we learned that the Trento exhibition was planning to make some of its resources available online.

We understood that in order to engage deeply with the reality of Brazil, it was not enough simply to translate the material from Italian into Portuguese. We asked ourselves, why don't we create something online specifically designed for our own country? Working with experts from the younger generations who joined our team, we split into three groups to adapt the original Trento material, prepare videos and assess the financial implications. It was an experience of unity among generations. The main challenge was to maintain faithfulness to the narrative of the Trento exhibition while incorporating a Brazilian approach and the language of social media.

What can online visitors expect from this exhibition? Firstly, four promotional videos and a launch video of the exhibition. Then, we meet Chiara Lubich and her charisma through three main themes: being – the

story of Chiara Lubich; influence – testimonies of people who know and live the spirituality of unity; action – the many and varied realities born through the charism.

What do you think is Chiara Lubich’s message for Brazil today, in the context of the global pandemic we are living through?

When she visited Brazil in 1991, Chiara Lubich seeing the inequalities present in our society, had an intuition of an Economy of Communion. She foresaw that the Movement in Brazil was called to engage in a communion of goods on a global level. Today, in the context of the pandemic, living this charism in

practice means taking care of each other, not only sharing material goods but dedicating our lives in service of others, not asking ourselves ‘who is my neighbour?’ but rather ‘who am I a neighbour to?’. As Pope Francis has written in his Encyclical “Fratelli tutti”, we are called as a people to act in fraternity, following the example of the Good Samaritan. Only in this way will “new men and women” (of the Gospel) emerge to build a more inclusive and fraternal society.

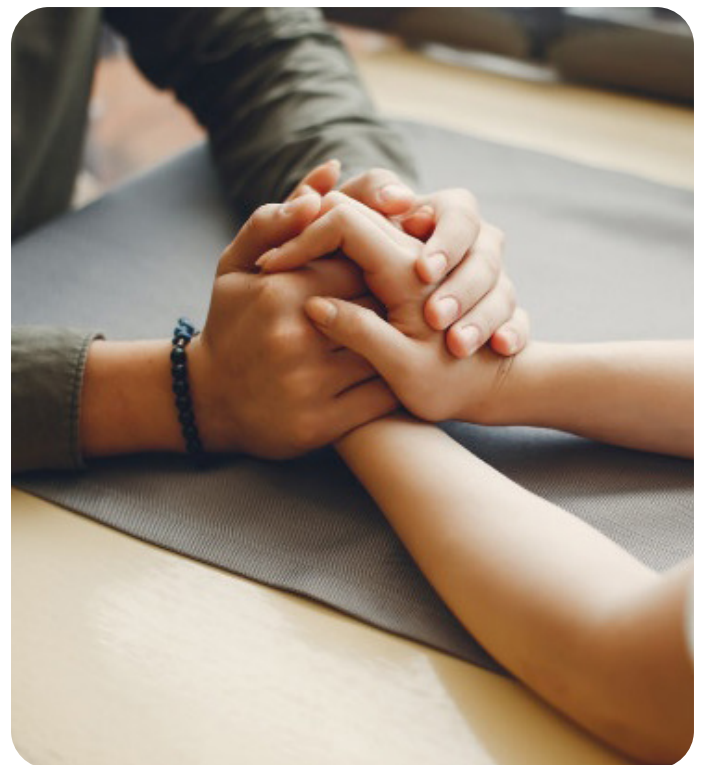
*Anna Lisa Innocenti
Wednesday, November 18, 2020*

Gospel lived: **being instruments of consolation**

A marriage saved

One of our daughters was going through an extremely difficult moment in her marriage. When I spoke to her on the phone she was in tears and confided in me that she had lost all hope of saving her marriage and that the only solution was to divorce. My husband and I have always been struck by the promise Jesus made to the disciples: “If two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” With this faith, I promised our daughter that we and her five other siblings would pray for reconciliation. Not long afterwards, she called me up. She sounded elated and almost incredulous. After much reflection, her husband agreed to talk to people who could help them solve their problems, and they did manage to save their marriage. A few years later, our son-in-law shared with her his desire to become a Catholic and asked her to come with him to see a priest so that they could start the process.

(G. B. – Usa)



(taken from Il Vangelo del Giorno, year VI, no.6, November-December 2020) Friday, November 20, 2020



The pain felt by Focolare due to a case of abuse in France

Maria Voce: *“Immense suffering and unconditional collaboration by the Movement so as achieve clarity; the establishment of an independent inquiry after a meeting with some victims of a former consecrated member of Focolare”.*

“Faced with this immense suffering, we are convinced that the only path to follow is that of offering the victims full attention and recognition of the harm done. I wish here to reiterate the Movement’s full and unconditional collaboration, to shed full light on the facts and do justice to the victims.”

This is what Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement, said in a press release dated 22nd October 2020 on the case of violence against minors by J.M.M. a former consecrated member of the Focolare, who lives in France.

A victim has made his case public, which goes back to 1981 and 1982 when – aged 15 – he was sexually molested.

An independent body is being established through which the Focolare Movement has decided to initiate a special inquiry, after the meeting with some victims on 18th

September 2020. On that occasion Jesús Morán, Co-president of the Focolare Movement, expressed his pain and shame for the abuses suffered *“and also for the silence or lack of initiative sustained for years on the part of various people in positions of responsibility”.*

The composition of the independent body will be made public shortly. Its task will be to listen to the victims and to gather further testimonies, as well as investigating whether there were any omissions, cover ups or silences on the part of those responsible for the Movement. At the end of the investigation, the independent Body will make its final report public.

In the interests of the completeness of the investigation and to guarantee full transparency, the two people co-responsible for the Focolare in France and one of the people co-responsible for the Movement in Western Europe offered their resignation from their respective roles on 21st October 2020. These were accepted by the Focolare President..

Joachim Schwind
Thursday, October 22, 2020



Asking for forgiveness with all our hearts

The President and Co-President of the Focolare returned to the subject of sexual abuse by consecrated members of the Movement and asked for forgiveness from all the victims. “We must do all we can to ensure that traumas of this kind do not happen again in the future”.

Last Sunday, December 13th, at 12 noon there were several thousand people connected from all over the world for the Link Up, the customary appointment in video-conference that for over thirty years has brought together the members of the Focolare Movement. Jesús Morán and Maria Voce, respectively Co-President and President of the Focolare Movement, took the opportunity to look back at the serious and painful issue of sexual abuse of minors, in which consecrated persons of the Movement are also involved. Already in March 2019 Maria Voce had written a letter to all the members worldwide to inform them of this serious scourge.

Below is their address during the Link Up:

Jesús: Yes, unfortunately – as you rightly say – we have to admit that this scourge of abuse, not only child abuse but also abuse of authority, and other kinds of abuse, has also occurred among us. In this sense, we would like to take this opportunity of a worldwide link to ask for forgiveness wholeheartedly, sincerely, of all the people who have been victims of any form of abuse. This is the first thing we would like to say one year after that letter.

Then, as we know that this is never enough, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to the work we are doing, and that we want to improve more and more, in terms of prevention and training, so that these things don't happen anymore, because they are so contradictory to what Chiara gave us, that they really shouldn't happen anymore.

And then we reiterate the accompaniment of the victims, which is the most important thing and we hope to be able to do it even better, even more effectively.

Emmaus: Certainly, of course. It is a suffering that we live together, that we take on together, all together, and only together can we overcome it, because it is a great suffering for everyone.

I remember we wrote in that letter that every single case for us means a profound purification of the Movement, and we consider it as such. We accept it – and we said so – with humility and deep compassion for those who have suffered indescribable traumas perhaps because of our lack of attention, and we commit ourselves to directing or refocusing our conduct as individuals and as a Movement towards an ever more conscious and mature commitment to the safeguarding and well-being of minors in particular. But we added at the time – we stressed this in that letter – that we must also be careful to look beyond our Movement, because of course we want to contribute to the fraternity of all, and therefore we must take on board the cry of pain of all those who suffer abuse, especially children but not only, children and young people of the world. And this attention must lead us to see all these people as the Spouse we have chosen, as Jesus forsaken. So we should feel drawn to go and console this pain and to do everything possible to ensure that traumas of this kind do not happen again in future.

This applies to the abuse of children and minors, as well as to all the other types of abuse, even of older people, disabled, of those who suffer abuse of any kind, of their rights, their personhood, and their dignity. We should feel drawn to go and love and relieve these wounds, to respond as far as possible with our attention and love for the victims, for all those who suffer, and to ensure that these traumas never happen again.

Stefania Tanesini
Monday, December 14, 2020



An international award to the Focolare Movement for its commitment towards the environment

The Focolare Movement received the “I do my part” international award from the Kronos Academy for its commitment in favour of our planet through its ecological initiative by EcoOne. Pope Francis and Thor Heyerdahl, the Norwegian explorer and anthropologist are also among the winners of the 2020 edition. The latter received the award posthumously.

An old African tale relates that during a forest fire a hummingbird, the smallest of birds, flew towards the fire while all other animals fled away from it. When the lion asked the hummingbird about its behaviour, the bird with a drop of water on its beak, replied: “I’m doing my part!”. The international award, assigned by the Kronos Academy takes its name from this story. It has now reached its fourth edition, and it is rewarded annually to people, entities and nations that “do their part” in favour of the environment and the earth’s climate.

Among the eight winners of this edition, there is also EcoOne, the Focolare international initiative promoted by a network of lecturers, academics, researchers and professionals who perform in environmental sciences and strive to enrich their scientific knowledge through a profound humanistic reading of contemporary ecological problems (www.ecoone.org).

Due to the pandemic, the award ceremony could not be held, as scheduled, at the Protomoteca Hall of the Campidoglio in Rome. The Focolare Movement received its reward on Thursday, 26 November 2020, at its international headquarters in Rocca di Papa, Rome from Vincenzo Avalle, member of the National Board of the Kronos Academy, who was accompanied by Armando Bruni, the Coordinator for the Academy in Central Italy and three environmental officers. Prof. Luca Fiorani, President of EcoOne received the award on behalf of the Focolare Movement. He was presented with a sculpture

of a hummingbird, made of recycled metal by the artist Renato Mancini, and an award certificate.

“This award is meant to stimulate, to motivate all those who are committed to protect the environment”, explained Vincenzo Avalle, while he continued: “I was struck by the complex Focolare activity in favour of the environment as expressed by EcoOne, supported by science and interaction with politics”.

When Fiorani received the award, he said: “I can see a great synergy between the Kronos Academy and the Focolare/EcoOne, because we are complementary: Kronos originates from action, EcoOne from reflection. We need one another. The Focolare Movement can contribute to different areas of cultural depth, especially economy and politics, both decisive for the environment. We can also offer our international experience”. He added: “I see a possibility of collaboration, of very strong synergy. There are so many entities that work for the environment. I think it’s time that all these organizations pool their work together”.

The Kronos Academy (www.accademiakronos.it) continues with the work and spirit of “Kronos 1991”, one of the first environmental organisations that was set up. With about 10,000 members in Italy and international offices and references, it is committed to protect the environment and quality of life. In collaboration with Scientific Institutes and Universities, Kronos offers a degree course for “Environmental Educator and Disseminator” and two masters degree courses in “Health and Environment”, and it supports a supervisory body for environmental prevention and information. But above all it invites people the world over to “do their part” to safeguard the environment.

*Joachim Schwind
Thursday, November 26, 2020*



Words of Life for 2021

January:

Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit (Cf John 15, 5-9).

February:

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Lk 6:36).

March:

“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.” (Ps 25:4).

April:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11).

May:

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (1 Jn 4:16).

June:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt 7:21).

July:

“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” (Mt 9:22).

August:

“Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:4).

September:

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mk 9:35).

October:

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom. 8:28).

November:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt 5:9).

December:

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” (Lk 1:45).



Members of the Movement who have concluded their earthly life:

29 October 2020

Nicolino Sias – married focolarino from Italy

31 October 2020

Joseph Heugens - married focolarino from Belgium

03 November 2020

Vincenzo Chiarle - priest focolarino from Italy

03 November 2020

Jean-Pierre Prodan - focolarino from France

06 November 2020

Frédéric (Fred) Assouad - married focolarino from Lebanon

06 November 2020

Maria Carmen Soto Escario - focolarina from Spain

20 November 2020

Guido Bonino - priest focolarino from Italy

21 November 2020

Gianfranco Mangarella - married focolarino from Italy

21 November 2020

Ercilio Arcanjo Da Silva - priest focolarino from Brazil

24 November 2020

Pio Pellegrini - priest focolarino from Italy

24 November 2020

Lino Richter - married focolarino from Italy

24 November 2020

Karl-Heinz Grimm - priest focolarino from Germany

25 November 2020

Fabio Fiorelli - focolarino from Albania

29 November 2020

Nella Marinaio Pasquariello - married focolarina from Italy

29 November 2020

Mauro Nirani - focolarino from Italy

04 December 2020

Stefano Landonio - priest focolarino from Italy

04 December 2020

Siegfried Hitzler - focolarino from Germany

07 December 2020

Sandro Corti - married 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.

The editorial staff

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IBAN: IT 94 U 02008 39143 000400380921
BIC: UNCRITM1404

The present Mariapolis Newsletter in PDF format is a selection of news items published on the Focolare Movement's website - P.A.F.O.M. www.focolare.org/en/mariapoli/

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