

MARIAPOLIS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

24 JANUARY - 7 FEBRUARY

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2021

PRESIDENT
ELECTED
2021-2026



MARGARET KARRAM

*“What I most want to do is to live Chiara’s words: **be a family!**”*

*Margaret Karram
President of Focolare Movement*



At the start of the General Assembly of the Focolare

From 24th January to the 7th February the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement will take place on-line. It will be the moment to renew the roles of President, Co-President, the leadership team and will define the orientations and future projects for the next six years.

The Assembly has been preceded by a series of formative and informative webinars in which all the communities of the Focolare world -wide have participated. Next Sunday, 24th January 2021 will mark the beginning of the Third General Assembly of the Focolare since the death of its founder Chiara Lubich. The Assembly which should have taken place at the beginning of September 2020, was postponed because of the pandemic. The Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life agreed to its postponement and that the whole event should take place on-line.

Participation

362 people from all over the world will participate, representing the different cultures, generations, vocations, church membership and religious faiths that are present in the Focolare Movement. In order to encourage the involvement of as many people as possible, in February 2019, Maria Voce, the actual president, established a preparatory commission. They had the task of collecting suggestions for subjects to be discussed in the assembly, of identifying the names of candidates for the elections and to prepare the program.

Elections of the president, copresident and councilors

Using a system of on-line voting, on 31st January the election of the President^[1] will take place. On February 1st, the Copresident will be elected and on February 4th there will be the elections of the councilors who collaborate with the President in the different roles in the governance of the Movement. She is the one, then, who distributes their different roles.

Another task of the General Assembly is to decide on topics proposed by the Centre of the Movement, presented on the

initiative of the President, of the General Council, of a section, branch, or movement. Each participant in the Assembly can suggest that other topics should be discussed.

What subjects will be addressed?

The more than 3,000 proposals that have arrived from the whole world, concerning the subjects to be dealt with in the Assembly and the directions that the Movement should follow in the next six years, are a true reflection of the liveliness of the people of the Focolare. They also demonstrate the awareness of the “change of an era” which is already in action, as Pope Francis said in 2018 when he met the Focolare Community in Loppiano.

The many suggestions received have been divided into four main categories: the bringing up to date of the charism that has been handed down by the foundress; the culture that stems from the charism of unity; the answer to the environmental crisis and the pandemic; working together with the new generations.

In a recent interview the current Copresident of the Focolare, Jesús Morán, said that there will also be space for dialogue and discussion concerning the topic of abuse, both in the six-yearly report of the President which will open the Assembly and in a specific talk of the Copresident.

Although we represent a diversity of voices, yet there is the general need to determine new and up to date pathways of fraternity, capable of answering the challenges and the questions of humanity today at both a global and a local level.

News and up-dates on the work of the Assembly will be available daily on the web page of the focolare and through future press releases.

*Stefania Tanesini – +39 3385658244
January 21, 2021*

[1] As it says in the Statutes, the President of the Movement will always be a woman. This is to emphasise the Movement’s Marian profile and its predominantly lay characteristic and so “to preserve the design that God had on it since he entrusted its beginning and development to a woman.” As it says in the Statutes, “Hers is to be above all, a presidency of love because she must be the first in loving and therefore, in serving her own brothers and sisters, remembering the words of Jesus: “...whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all” (Mk 10:44).

ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 1

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 1

Solemn, family atmosphere

General Assembly: Diary 1 – January 24, 2021

It has begun! The Focolare Movement General Assembly started at 12.30 (UTC +1). It has been long awaited for, and Focolare members and adherents from all over the world have participated in its preparation. It was scheduled to start at the beginning of September 2020, but had to be postponed because of the pandemic. It is now being held electronically.

The choice of this date is very significant. Two days ago, on January 22, when it was Chiara Lubich's birthday, the Movement marked the end of the birth centenary year of its founder. Today, January 24, it recalls the day when in 1944, Chiara 'discovered' the reality of Jesus Forsaken who became the 'spouse of her soul' and moved her to 'seek him' in all the suffering and pain of humanity and to rebuild relationships and bridges of unity.



According to what is defined by its rules, the Assembly is "the first and most important governing body of the Focolare Movement". 360 members are taking part in it; 139 are there by right, 181 have been elected and 40 have been invited by the President.

Although these participants are in different places all over the world, they all entered the one big virtual hall, aware of the solemnity and importance of this moment. They are all contributing to build the worldwide lively family atmosphere, which is also present on the virtual platform.



Maria Voce, the outgoing president, who is at the end of her second term, opened the Assembly with a solemn appeal. She invited the participants to put themselves in the attitude of Jesus at the Last Supper and wash one another's feet. She said that this means being ready "to listen to one another, to understand one another, to go beyond differences, to become truly brothers, which means truly equal, truly with the highest dignity, which is the dignity that Jesus gives us because he makes us all children of God and brothers and sisters".

Rules being followed, today's meeting included several voting sessions. In the first election, the two moderators who will coordinate and lead the work were chosen. They are Uschi Schmitt, a German doctor and Andrea Ponta, an Italian engineer. Then there was the approval of the electoral commission; its members are Danilo Viridis, Flavia Cerino, Waldery Hilgeman, Laura Bozzi and Sister Tiziana Merletti, all residing in Italy. For legal reasons they are all present at the official seat of the Assembly, the International Focolare Centre in Rocca di Papa (Italy).

In subsequent voting sessions, the Assembly approved the programme for these days and an amendment to the Movement's General Statutes reducing the minimum number of councillors to be elected from 30 to 20.

The three days of spiritual retreat for participants will begin tomorrow.

*Focolare Communications Office
January 24, 2021*

ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 2

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 2

A Global pact

General Assembly /25 January 2021

The second day of the General Assembly of the Focolare began with an ecumenical prayer presented by participants from various Churches. It was addressed to Jesus in his forsakenness on the cross, so that he would help each one to “grow in listening to one another”; teach us to “welcome together the Holy Spirit” and “the cry of today’s humanity” so as “to become instruments of unity”.

Then there were further votes which had been put off from yesterday and which are necessary for adapting the regulation of the Assembly to an on-line format.

So, the spiritual retreat for all the participants started a little late and it will finish on Wednesday 27th January. This is an essential moment in the Assembly, as it says in the Movement’s Statutes, “so that the voters...may be docile to the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

The first topic chosen, put the participants in front of what could be defined as the entrance key into the mysticism of Chiara Lubich: a solemn pact made by the foundress on 16th July 1949 with the politician and author Igino Giordani, co-founder of the Movement, in the Dolomites. In that pact – as was emphasized by Fr Fabio Ciardi, Oblate of Mary Immaculate and theologian in consecrated life – Chiara Lubich and Igino Giordani, asked Jesus who they had just received in the Eucharist to be the one to create unity between them. They asked him to use their full and mutual readiness to welcome the other, to value the thought of the other and in this way to open up a space to allow the Holy Spirit to enter.

Moreover, it was emphasized that forgiveness and mercy lie at the basis of this pact and the participants were immediately invited to put this premise into practice. In fact, anyone who wanted to, could contact another participant with whom they wanted to be reconciled, before formulating this pact – all together and each in their own language – in a global prayer that went beyond every boundary.

Several stories and experiences showed us how this communitarian mysticism can become life: Vicky and Vic, a married couple from the Philippines shared how they lived and overcame Vic’s Covid infection; Somjit, a Buddhist from Thailand shared how he tries to live the gift of self, according to the teachings of Buddha. Also, Jordi an agnostic from Spain, spoke of his commitment together with his wife who is Christian, to coordinate various groups for dialogue.

And Rassim, a Muslim from Algeria, found in the Koran the encouragement to put up with others and to declare that he was ready to live mutual love without conditions.

As a conclusion to this day of retreat the participants were divided into 34 virtual rooms for group meetings, in which not only were they able to share thoughts and reflections, but also to put into practice what had been presented during the day: mutual deep listening and the complete welcoming of one another.

*Focolare Communications office
January 25, 2021*



Fabio Ciardi
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Vicky e Vic © CSC Audiovisivi



Somjit, a Buddhist from Thailand
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Rassim, a Muslim from Algeria
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Charism, prophecy, incarnation

General Assembly Diary 3, 26 January 2021

“Who knows if our role is not so much to give ‘light’, but rather to enter into the darkness, into the mud, into the desperation of lack of dignity, [...] into the thousands of different kinds of poverty of our times?” This provocative question may best capture the second day of the spiritual retreat of the Focolare General Assembly.

After the opening ecumenical prayer which emphasized the need for a profound conversion of hearts, Stefan Tobler, theologian of the Swiss Reformed Church and Paula Luengo, psychologist from Chile, presented the central theme of ‘incarnation’: what does the fact that God became man, least among the least, actually mean? And what does living and implementing the spirituality of unity mean for the Focolare today?

The academics presented their reflections from two complementary points of view. Stefan Tobler turned to the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich in order to highlight the value of the incarnation. “For Chiara, it is not just a past moment in history, but rather a fact that permanently changed the meaning of all creation, giving a value of eternity, of highest dignity to the things of this earth”. And, Dr Tober concluded, the incarnation will continue if we’re able to “have simple eyes which can discover God under the reality of this world”.

The new dignity which the world assumes when seen from this viewpoint, should provoke a change of

perspective in us, explained Paula Luengo. “We’ll never find our identity by navel-gazing. But rather, as Chiara says, by embracing ‘all those who are alone.’” We must – continued Dr Luengo – “take humanity, in all its depths, as our starting-point. So incarnation is a movement seeking out closeness and a going down deep”.

Two other contributors reached the same conclusion. Luigino Bruni, Italian, Professor of Political Economics and the History of Economic Thought, and Silvina Chemen, Argentinian, Rabbi in Buenos Aires, offered their reflections on “charism, prophecy and incarnation”, posing the question: is it still possible to speak of the prophetic dimension of a charism today? “Where there are brothers and sisters,” argued Silvina Chemen, “there is prophecy. Where there’s fraternity, the voice [of God] appears; when we’re truly together, God manifests himself”.

Many questions about the present and future of the Movement came up in the group meetings, such as what it means today to remain faithful to the roots. Luigino Bruni offered, “It’s always particularly difficult for a charismatic community to be able to understand that the first story, the wonderful story which made us day-dream and showed us heaven, is over. But the story will continue because the promise was far greater than the first form our faith adopted in the first part of the journey”.

*Focolare Communications Office
January 26, 2021*



Stefan Tobler
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Silvina Chemen
© CSC Audiovisivi



Paula Luengo
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Luigino Bruni
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ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 4

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 4

Saints together

General Assembly Diary 4, 27 January 2021

At the heart of the meditations, the reflections, and the communion in this third and final day of the spiritual retreat of the General Assembly, is the icon of the Most Blessed Trinity. This was presented as the model of a “collective holiness” by Maria Voce and as relationships of love that bring out the “design of God” on every person by Claudio Guerrieri.

It wasn't by chance that the ecumenical prayer at the beginning of the day was prepared by Christians from two Orthodox Churches, whose traditions include a huge treasure of reflections and contemplation of the Blessed Trinity.

In her meditation, Maria Voce, who will soon be leaving her role as President of the Focolare, once more drew our attention to the general aim of the Movement: “the perfection in love”, as Chiara Lubich wrote. This means complete personal fulfillment through the giving of oneself to others; or using a more conventional expression it could be defined as holiness. But a holiness -as Maria Voce underlines- that is typical of the Focolare: a “Collective holiness”.

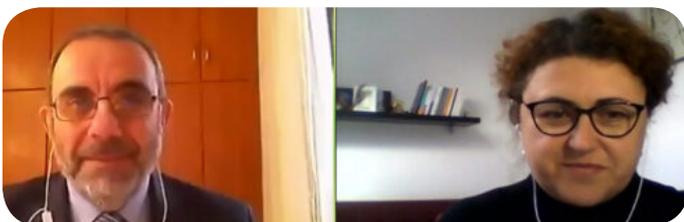
In order to explain this concept, the President retold the story of the beginning of the Movement where we saw Chiara with her first friends living the Gospel in a radical way. It was a life “for God and for the others -as Chiara herself explained - in a total forgetfulness of ourselves and of everything that could have made us fall into withdrawing into ourselves”. And so, a way to a new holiness was born, “both radical and light, a holiness that

could be open to everyone, and could be achieved in the family, in the midst of the world, together”, a holiness in company with others. This is a holiness that always asks for a personal listening to what God wants but, to do this knowing that one is travelling with others, in fact looking at the other and the presence of God in him or her.

The Italian philosopher, Claudio Guerrieri, member of the study center of the Focolare, the Abba School, continued these reflections, focusing on one of the effects of the “collective holiness”: what emerges from this is the true personality of each one, the plan or design of God on each person. This is an aspect that is very present in the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich from 1949/1950 which offer a model of communion and of unity, “not as uniformity, but that includes a plurality of voices in which each one, as a part, expresses the whole.” This can be seen by the fact that in the Focolare Movement, as well as Chiara Lubich, also two co-founders are present, Iginio Giordani and Pasquale Foresi, who through their “designs” the charism of Chiara was opened up and became incarnate.

So, these three days of deep retreat have drawn to a close, at times maybe it was also a bit unsettling but full of ideas also for the decisions that have to develop. As one of the young people described in the final session of communion: “It's been a moment for listening to one another and for trying to understand in what direction the Holy Spirit is calling the Focolare in this future period, and to whom to entrust the tasks for taking ahead this Work (of Mary) with the challenges and the opportunities that the next six years will present.”

*Focolare Communications Office
January 27, 2021*



Christians from two Orthodox Churches
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Claudio Guerrieri
© CSC Audiovisivi



Maria Voce
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The President's report

General Assembly Diary 5 – January 28, 2021

Today, at the Focolari Assembly it has been a day of assessment. The programme included group discussion on the President's report on the past six years. The participants received the document over a week ago and so each one had time to examine it in detail. Many questions emerged; some of which were put to the President Maria Voce and to Co-President Jesús Morán in the early afternoon.

Maria Voce explained that the report was not meant to be “a list of activities”, but rather to offer “a reading of the experience lived”. She drew attention to the so-called “new structure” of the Focolare Movement: a process initiated to actualize the charism of unity in the different contexts of the world. Maria Voce admitted that this process has created “a certain disorientation” in various areas, but she also underlined its positive effects: a new protagonism in the local communities and new synergies between the many branches of the Movement and its territorial subdivisions, that gave room to a new creativity.

After highlighting the valuable contribution given by the new generations of the Movement, among whom she found “committed people, ready to assume their responsibilities”, the President gave an analysis of the three orientations that emerged from the Assembly in 2014. Regarding the first point, “outgoing”, she highlighted the areas in the most varied environments, such as in the social field or in intercultural dialogue, in which the Focolare has offered its typical contribution to unity. With regards to the second point, “together”, she noted that there is less tendency towards fragmentation within the Movement, while tendency towards more synergistic work is on the increase. Finally, she emphasised that efforts have been made to live the last point, “properly prepared”, by developing new paths of human and spiritual formation for members and leaders.

Both the report and the subsequent answers given by Maria Voce and Jesús Morán did not hide the challenges and critical points that the Movement is facing, such as the difficulty in finding suitable ways and means to communicate its charism in a way that is relevant to today's world; a drop in the number of vocations and the great challenge that arose because of the painful emergence of different forms of abuse even within the Movement, which means – as Co-President Morán stated – the need to continue along the path of “an inevitable and necessary process of ‘purification of memory’ that we are called to live with humility and hope”.

The perspectives referred to by the President at the end of her report started from a reading of the “signs of the times”, that is, the questions posed by the world's situation, including that of the Covid pandemic: this asks for a sober and sustainable lifestyle, an increased sensitivity to the role of the new media and a greater attention to the family. She ended with a decisive appeal to live a radical faithfulness to the Gospel, which for the Focolare Movement means faithfulness to the key word of its charism: “Father, may they all be one” (Jn 17:21).

*Focolare Communications Office
January 28, 2021*



Maria Voce e Jesús Morán
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Maria Voce: building relationships with all, this is the Focolare's essential contribution

How has Maria Voce lived her role as the first President of the Focolare Movement after Chiara Lubich? In a recent interview with Vatican Radio on 27 January, she speaks of the current situation of the Movement and how it relates to the message of Pope Francis. We publish some of the main areas covered.

It's certainly no small undertaking to preside over such a vast and complex reality as the Focolare Movement, with over 2 million people adhering to its message in 182 countries. The outgoing president is Maria Voce, born in Cosenza Province in southern Italy, a lawyer by profession, with further studies in theology and canon law. In this interview for Vatican Radio, she recounts her experience of 12 years at the helm of the Movement.

Joys and sufferings, even failures here and there, limitations and opportunities: the life of the Movement has surely always been made of these, and in recent years too. If you had to describe in just a few words what the reality of the Focolare is today, what would you say?

I could describe it as a tree, a tree which may have shed some of its blossom and leaves, perhaps becoming more autumnal as an image, but a tree all the same with very strong roots still intact. These roots are capable of containing and maintaining the lymph and warmth necessary for nourishing the seeds of this tree, which have already spread throughout every continent across the world. Therefore it still has the possibility of continuing to nourish them and make them germinate, as they are in fact germinating in many places. Just now, maybe we see them in a winter setting, with winter temperatures, but it's actually in winter that the seeds mature below ground in order to be able to flower in spring. And I think it's a tree that's preparing a new spring time in the Movement.

Pope Francis and the Focolare Movement: you are obviously in great accord from the perspective of openness to dialogue and the need to build a different kind of world. In particular, the Pope's appeal for fraternity in the human family finds the Movement in the front line in terms of dialogue with members of other religions and with those of non-religious beliefs. How do you see the Movement's contribution in this?

I think it's essential. Because it was always essential to Chiara from the very beginning. Undoubtedly through the grace of the charism of unity received from the Holy Spirit, from the start she felt drawn to approach every person in the spirit of fraternity. And she did this all the time, whoever she met. Catholics in the early days, from the Monsignors who were interrogating her, as we saw in the new film about Chiara, to the poor people living in Trento. The same when she met members of other Churches, of other religions or people without a religious faith. Chiara met brothers and sisters in everyone, and she treated them as such. Chiara taught us this approach and it remains in the Movement, and we see this as an extraordinary source of power.

We've also recognized it in these days leading up to our Assembly. Members of the Movement who belong to different Churches and religions, or who are of good will without a specific religious affiliation, have been active in the preparations, testifying in particular to the power of love which is capable of creating relationships at all levels, capable of overcoming conflicts, capable of enabling you to meet together with people from a different religion to your own, even if up to yesterday you were sworn enemies. But now, we discover one another as persons, who can pray together, who can together seek the meaning of life, the significance of the pandemic, what it means to live for others, to act in solidarity with others. We've

seen it in their words of wisdom, in their interest in what the Movement is preparing, in their active participation in the Assembly preparations, with their suggestions, with their life, because obviously inspired by the same Holy Spirit who moves beyond all borders and all barriers. So I have the impression that it's this contribution which the Pope feels he can count on. But not only the Pope, the whole Church and all humanity. Because there's a dire need for this fraternity and the Movement has a special grace to build it precisely because of the charism of unity which comes from Chiara.

Talking about relationships, you recently made some strong comments about the need for the Movement to take a new step in understanding that God is not only Love, but also Trinity ...

God is Trinity, which means God in himself is relationship. This means that all who seek God, must build relationships in order to find him. And I don't believe there's anyone who is not searching for God. They might search for the truth, and God is truth. They might seek beauty, and God is beauty too. They might search for goodness in the world, and God is also goodness. God is everything any human being can search for and can be found if we build relationships. And I believe everyone is capable of this, because we're all created in the image of God, in the image of God Trinity.

According to your Statutes, the President of the Work of Mary will always be a woman. I believe the Movement is one of the few places in which you could say being a woman is actually an advantage. But it's also sending a good message to civil society and the Church ...

I must admit to be somewhat perplexed by the use of the word "advantage". Because to tell you the truth, being at the head of a Movement like ours actually means being the first to serve, the first to increase your acts of love, the first to accept any kind of challenge, anything and overcome it with the help of God and of your brothers and sisters. So, while in one sense, it might be an advantage to be considered capable of being elected, I don't really think this is the spirit in which we live it. And I don't think the

Focolarine women, who are the only ones who can 'aspire' to this, if you must put it this way, I don't they live it like that. It's much more with a spirit of love and service for Chiara's Work which everyone wishes to continue to serve with the same love as Chiara loved and guided and served the Movement.

And then, I do also think it can be a testimony to the kind of equality, of profound fraternity, of equal dignity, that goes beyond the differences of gender, which God brought to the world when he created humankind in his image and created male and female. So united in this complementarity, which respects diversity and enables each one to emerge in their own capacity to give, which will of course be different because God made two different beings, different but made to be together and to build humanity together in his image and likeness. In this sense, I think it can be seen as a sign of progress, of something emerging more and more in the Church and in society. But I think it's nothing other than a manifestation of the Marian profile of the Church, the profile which says that Mary is woman, mother, but queen too, also with her Son on Calvary founder of the Church, 'coredemptrix' of humanity, principle of unity for all. In this sense, then, I think yes it's a privilege the Movement can be proud of and can offer to the Church and the world as an example and forerunner, in some way.

Maria Voce, today what do you wish for the Work of Mary of the future?

For the Movement, I would wish, like Chiara, for the greatest fidelity to the Gospel, faithfulness that can reach a heroic level, because it's fidelity to living the Gospel concretely. And I would say, for this Work to continue its journey, faithfulness to that word of the Gospel which God wished to pronounce by sending this charism, namely the word "unity". So, faithfulness to this unity, which must be total. It must be capable of living relationships as they're lived in the Trinity, in order to testify to the world that God exists, that through the Movement he can bring fraternity more widely in the Church and in the world, to contribute to fulfilling the prayer of Jesus, "Father, that they may all be one".

*Adriana Masotti
Vatican News
January 29, 2021*

ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 6

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 6

Group work: centred on dialogue

General Assembly Diary 6, 29 January 2021

“Open Space Technology” is being adopted by the Focolare General Assembly to conduct its group work today and tomorrow. The system permits the 359 participants linked online around the world to divide into virtual working groups to speak and dialogue in a more intimate way, as if seated around the same table.

To facilitate participation across all the lines of latitude, the work sessions are organized in three different time zones, corresponding to the geographical groupings of Asia and Oceania; Africa, Europe and the Middle East; the Americas.

The fact that the Assembly is dedicating several days to working in groups, to consider and discuss a range of topics, demonstrates the strongly-felt need for a global dialogue at the heart of it all. This was evident from the start of the pre-assembly process two years ago which got many different Focolare communities around the globe involved. Individuals and groups participated in a worldwide program of reflection, and sent the Assembly Planning Commission over 3,000 proposals of what should be covered in these days.

These ideas were gathered and collated into 16 general topic areas. From these, a subsequent international survey among Focolare members identified four priority themes:

- a profound consideration of the roots of the charism of unity today;
- implementing the charism in all areas, in collaboration with the Churches, with institutions, with the faithful of different religions and with people of good will;
- giving particular attention to an integral ecology which considers how to take care of the person, the family and our common home, with an outlook to the future;
- living inter-generational dialogue, particularly with the new generations.

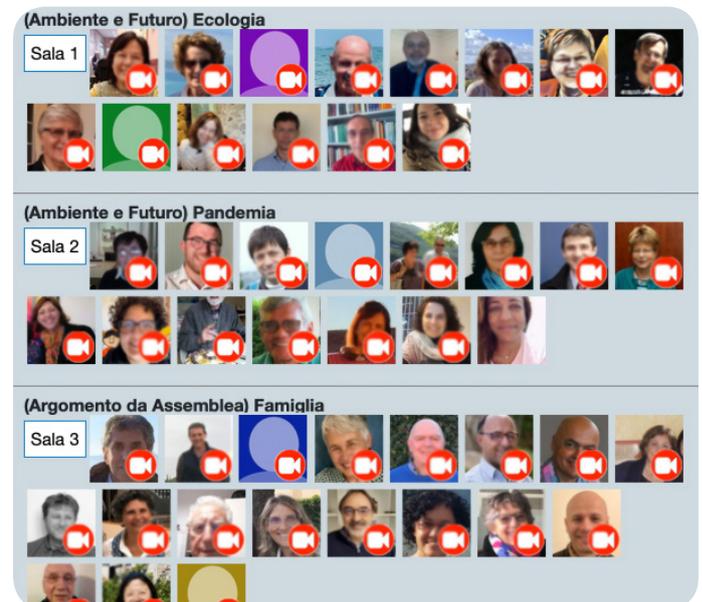
During these opening days of the Assembly, the participants have added another three macro-groups of topics, namely:

- family
- governance
- option for the least, for the excluded.

What emerges from the working groups over these days will form a substantial contribution to the production of the ‘final document’ which will outline the future direction and prospects “for the guidelines that will be elaborated and implemented above all locally and in profound synergy between the international centre and the Movement present in the different geographical zones”, as Maria Voce said yesterday.

The final document will be drawn up by an editorial team of eight Assembly members. The text will then be presented for approval by the whole General Assembly.

*Focolare Communications Office
January 29, 2021*



ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 7

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 7

A glimpse behind the scenes

General Assembly Diary 7 30 January 2021

As the Assembly continues to work on the priorities and lines of action for the next six years, today we'd like to offer a glimpse behind the scenes, to get to know the people who are keeping the "machine" working, without whom none of this could happen. The online nature of the event called for a network of collaborators and technicians specialized in different fields, indispensable not only for the efficacy of the digital platform but also to guarantee the juridical validity of this Assembly.



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But it's more than a network of collaborators or technical experts, according to Francesco Mazzarella, one of the video-conference hosting team working from Sicily. He writes:

Behind the online Assembly, a group of people around the world, the so-called technical experts, have been 'meeting'. We've been getting to know each other and creating a bond far beyond the technical aspect because there's been a spiritual sharing among us too. It's come about gradually, through a process of what we could call 'techno-relationship'.

Most of the time, we don't think about all that has to happen before an event can take place. Today, the



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No less than 73 people comprise the technical team of the Focolare General Assembly. Many are physically present in the Movement's international centre at Rocca di Papa in Italy, while others collaborate remotely from many parts of world including Brazil, the Philippines, France, Guatemala, Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Thailand and USA.

Twenty I.T. experts are working on the web pages and various apps. 14 hosts, divided into two teams, run all the various video-conferences. 34 translators in 7 countries guarantee the participants have simultaneous translations in 5 languages (French, English, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish). Then there is the 5-person squad responsible for the general coordination of all the technical teams.



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challenge goes via the internet, with the all uncertainties and challenges involved, and with all the possibilities it contains too.

To manage these moments online without seeing each other face to face, without being able to physically shake each other by the hand, is the real challenge of this Assembly.

But the greatest issue for the technicians is about making a gift of our own competencies, which have been acquired through much personal sweat and study. This requires a kind of exchange of trust. Let me explain myself. A technician, even those who have made a choice to follow the principles of the spirituality of unity in their work, is still a professional who takes personal pride in their work

and their own skills. The willingness to share methods or procedures that have been learnt with so much personal effort and study is not automatic. It requires a real act of faith, trusting that the others are there out of love, trusting that by so giving we are contributing to building the Assembly. So it's a connection of electronic signals and of souls which constitutes the foundation and tech-relationships of this adventure called our online Assembly.

Usually, the technicians only come to our attention when something isn't working properly. In this Assembly, it's different. Their work and their "style" are building this event, day by day. **Thanks to each one of them!**

*Focolare Communications Office
January 30, 2021*



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ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DIARIO 8

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIARY 8

Grande attesa

General Assembly Diary 8 – January 31, 2021

“Listen to the voice of the Lord today”! These words, taken from Psalm 94/95, “the thought for the day”, also known also as “Passaparola”, which reaches Focolare members worldwide daily, could not have been more appropriate. In fact, the elections for the future President of the Focolare Movement started today, and the first priority for the voters is to listen well to the voice of God to identify the right person who would be the president for the next six years.

As provided by the General Statutes, the following three steps are to be taken when electing the new President:

- she must be elected by at least two thirds of the eligible voters present. This fairly high proportion of voters expresses the wish of the founder, Chiara Lubich so that there would be the greatest possible consensus for this very important role. At the request of the participants, the election process can be interrupted to give space for communion in a plenary session and in small groups;
- having reached the necessary majority, the candidate must accept her election in front of the Assembly;

- then one has to wait patiently a bit more because there is the third step to be followed. Since the Movement is an association of pontifical right, the elected President – and later also the Co-President – must be confirmed by the Holy See, specifically by the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life. It is only after this confirmation that the election is valid and can be communicated.

- An electoral commission, presented to the Assembly and confirmed at its first plenary session on January 24, ensures that election rules are followed. The five members are all legal experts: Danilo Viridis, a married focolarino from Italy; Flavia Cerino, a focolarina from Italy, Laura Bozzi, a volunteer from Italy; Waldery Hilgeman, a volunteer from Holland and Sr. Tiziana Merletti, an Italian Franciscan.

The election process will continue tomorrow, February 1. Once the President has been elected, the Co-President will be elected in the same way.

*Focolare Communications Office
January 31, 2021*



Electoral commission © CSC Audiovisivi



Margaret Karram is the new President of the Focolare Movement

Elected on 31 January, she is the third President to lead the Movement after the founder, Chiara Lubich, and after Maria Voce who has just completed two terms.

PRESS RELEASE – 1st February 2021

Yesterday, **Margaret Karram**, was elected **President of the Focolare Movement** with more than two thirds of the votes cast among the participants in the General Assembly of the Movement, composed of 359 representatives from all over the world. She succeeds the founder Chiara Lubich and Maria Voce who was in office for 12 years (two terms).

Margaret Karram was born in Haifa, Israel in 1962 into a Palestinian Catholic family. She holds a B.A. in Jewish Studies from the American Jewish University in the United States. She has held various positions for the Focolare in Los Angeles and in Jerusalem. Her past experience includes membership of various commissions and organizations for the promotion of dialogue between the three monotheistic religions, such as the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land and the ICCI (Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel). She worked for 14 years at the Consulate General of Italy in Jerusalem.

Since 2014, she has been at the International Centre of the Focolare as councillor for Italy and Albania and co-responsible for Dialogue between Ecclesial Movements and New Catholic Communities.

She speaks Arabic, Hebrew, Italian and English. In 2013 she received the Mount Zion Award for Reconciliation, together with the scholar and researcher Yisca Harani, for their commitment to developing dialogue between different cultures and religions.

In 2016 she received the St Rita International Award for having promoted dialogue between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, starting from people's everyday life.

The election took place yesterday, 31 January 2021, but her appointment only became effective today, following

confirmation by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, as envisaged by the General Statutes of the Focolare Movement. The document expresses the hope that the new president will be able to carry out her task “with faithfulness, in a spirit of service and ecclesial sensitivity, for the good of the members of the Movement and of the universal Church.”

Duties of the Focolare President

According to the Movement's General Statutes, the President is chosen from among the focolarine (consecrated women with perpetual vows) and will always be a woman. In the Statutes we read, she “is the sign of the unity of the Movement”. This means that she represents the great religious, cultural, social and geographical variety of those who adhere to the spirituality of the Focolare in the 182 countries where the Movement is present and who identify with the message of fraternity that the founder, Chiara Lubich, drew from the Gospel: “Father, that they may all be one” (Jn 17:20-26).

There are many commitments and challenges awaiting Margaret Karram in the coming years: the tasks of governing and directing a worldwide Movement like the Focolare, which is deeply immersed in local and global realities and the challenges of humanity, starting from this time of pandemic. The Statutes also indicate the “style” that should distinguish the work of the President: “Hers is to be, above all, a presidency of love – they state – because she must be the first in loving and, therefore, in serving her own brothers and sisters, remembering the words of Jesus: “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be the servant of all” (Mk 10:44).

The primary commitment of the President, therefore, is to be a builder of bridges and a spokesperson for the central message of the spirituality of the Focolare, ready to practise and spread it, as we read further on, even at the cost of her own life.

The next steps of the General Assembly of the Focolare are the election of the Co-President this afternoon and of the councillors on 4th February.

*Stefania Tanesini
February 1, 2021*



Karam Family



Karam Family



Tony, Margaret, Mamma, Anna



With Gen 4 in the city of Haifa



Holy Land: event between Christians and Muslims



Mount Zion Award October 2013



Jesús Morán re-elected as co-president of the Focolare Movement

This is the second mandate for Jesús Morán, whose primary task is to fully support and collaborate with Margaret Karram, the newly elected president of the Focolare Movement.

The election of the co-president was also welcomed by the Focolare Assembly with worldwide applause and today, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life confirmed his appointment: Jesús Morán has been re-elected co-president of the Focolare. This is his second term of office after the one just concluded alongside Maria Voce.

Jesús Morán is 63 years old and was born in Navalperales de Pinares, Avila (Spain). He first came across the Gospel message proposed by the Focolare Movement during his university studies, through the witness of some of his fellow students. He graduated in Philosophy from the Autonomous University of Madrid and obtained a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago de Chile and a Doctorate in Theology from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

From 1996 to 2004 he was Focolare delegate for Chile and Bolivia, where he was ordained a priest on 21 December 2002. From 2004 to 2008 he was co-responsible for the

Movement in Mexico and Cuba.

At the 2008 Focolare General Assembly he was elected General Councillor and responsible for the cultural formation of the Movement's members. In 2009 he became a member of the "Abba School", an interdisciplinary study centre of the Focolare Movement, due to his expertise in theological anthropology and moral theology. Since 2014 he has been co-president of the Focolare Movement.

The duties of the Co-President

The first duty of the Co-President is full support and collaboration with the President. The Statutes of the Focolare speak of "the fullest unity with the President" in order to offer her the possibility of examining ideas and decisions, listening and searching together for the will of God.

He is responsible for the priests who adhere to the Focolare and ensures that the internal life and activities of the movement are in conformity with the faith and morals of the Church.

*Stefania Tanesini
February 2, 2021*



Greetings from around the world

General Assembly Diary 9/ 2 February 2021

After the first ten days, the Focolare General Assembly has reached a turning point. The election of the new President Margaret Karram, and the Holy See's confirmation today of the re-election of Co-President Jesús Morán, completes the first phase.

After the first ten days, the Focolare General Assembly has reached a turning point. The election of the new President Margaret Karram, and the Holy See's confirmation today of the re-election of Co-President Jesús Morán, completes the first phase.

Tomorrow, in her first official duty, the new President will establish the number of General Counsellors to be elected by the Assembly. These cannot be less than 20, in line with a recent modification to the General Statutes of the Movement.

Today, as the Assembly continued working on the direction and lines of action for the next six years, greetings and congratulations to the newly elected president have been pouring in from around the world. Here are a few highlights:

“With great pleasure we heard of your election as new president of the Focolare Movement. [...] Being so expert in dialogue between cultures [...] your nomination will strengthen the witness of unity among cultures and religions. [...] In the cooperation of ‘Together for Europe’ we wish to be a trustworthy partner in contributing to a new culture of unity”.

P. Heinrich Walter, Movimento di Schoenstatt

“Dear Margaret, [...] I wish to congratulate you, on behalf, also, of Andrea [Riccardi] and all the Community of Sant’Egidio on this important role. [...] We’ve met on various occasions already [...] particularly in our shared commitment for unity among movements and ‘Together for Europe’. [...] Building bridges and links of fraternity

is a real necessity for our world and a ‘vocation’ for which your own personal story, your provenance from a land of suffering and conflict, makes you particularly sensitive. [...] In this spirit of fraternity, we’ll continue our friendship between the Focolare Movement and the Community of Sant’Egidio”.

Marco Impagliazzo, Presidente della Comunità di Sant’Egidio

“The Federation of the Fellowship of Christians and Jews in Italy expresses our sincere best wishes for your new role. [...] We call to mind the light and colours of your cities: Haifa, Los Angeles and Jerusalem, and we hope to collaborate for the promotion of Jewish-Christian and inter-religious dialogue”.

“With great pleasure, on behalf of the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy, I extend our hearty congratulations on your nomination as President of the Focolare Movement. On behalf of the communities I represent, I renew our wish to collaborate always on the way of dialogue, of sharing, of encounter, in the hope of gathering fruits of peace.”

Yassine Lafram, presidente UCOII.

“The Order of the Holy Sepulchre sends our best wishes to the newly-elected President of the Focolare Movement, Margaret Karram. [...] As a Catholic Arab of Haifa, you have always been intensely involved in the activities of inter-religious dialogue working for the culture of encounter in the Holy Land.”

Before concluding this diary, we ask you, our dear readers, for your collaboration. Disappointingly, documents, photos and recordings of the General Assembly are already being shared on various platforms. Let us not forget that this Assembly is not a public event. Please help us to protect the reserved nature of our Assembly. Please don't join in the improper sharing of any content which has not been authorized by this office. **Thank you!**

*Focolare Communications Office
February 2, 2021*

ASSEMBLEA GENERALE
DIARIO 10

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DIARY 10

Voting has started for the men and women general councilors

Diary of the General Assembly no.10, 3rd February 2021

Today's program is dedicated once again to voting. The General Assembly has met together in a plenary session to begin the process of voting, so as to elect the men and women general councilors of the Focolare Movement and this will conclude tomorrow.

The councilors are the closest collaborators and consultants of the President. The total number is divided equally between men and women focolarini with perpetual vows and is specified by the newly elected President. Margaret Karram has decided there will be 22 councilors and in the coming days she will distribute their tasks to each of them.

There are many areas in which the councilors will be involved; these range from economy to prayer life, from care

of the environment and of the person, to communication, from culture to evangelization. They also have the task of keeping in touch and maintaining strong links with different countries or with whole geographical areas. The President can also entrust them with other special tasks.

Together with the President and Copresident they make up the "Centro dell'Opera", (The Center of the Work of Mary), which forms the beating heart of the Movement.

Tomorrow voting will continue and we will get to know the names of all the 22 councilors.

*Focolare Communications Office
February 3, 2021*



The Electoral Commission at work © CSC Audiovisivi

Election of the Councilors: A world team

Diary No.11 of the General Assembly 4th February

Between yesterday and today the 22 new general councilors of the Focolare have been elected. They come from 16 countries and 4 continents, their ages range from 52 -70 and they truly represent the multiculturalism that is a characteristic of the Focolare Movement. Many of them have lived in various geographical areas besides their country of origin, an important factor for getting to know in depth, the characteristics, needs and challenges of the many countries in which those who identify themselves in the Focolare's message of unity, are living.

At the opening of the voting for the councilors Margaret Karram said: "Let us ask for the Holy Spirit so that we can be guided only by him"; in fact this is only the first step towards the composition of the new "Center of the Movement". Shortly, the newly elected President will distribute their specific tasks to each one.

The intense work of today was concluded with a session dedicated to the presentation and approval of various proposals. Tomorrow the work will continue in plenary with sessions of dialogue on the plans and directions for the next 6 years.

In the meantime, let's get to know the names of the newly elected councilors and where they come from:

Women Councilors

Cuneo Chiara (Italy)
Escandell Silvia (Argentina)
Gomez Margarita (Spain)
Kempt Donna Lynn (USA)
Kobayashi Renata (Japan)
Koller Friederike (Germany)
Moussallem Rita (Lebanon)
Ngabo Bernadette (Dem. Rep. Congo)
Sanze Genevieve (Central African Republic)
Simon Renata (Germany)
Zanolin Clara (Italy)



Men Councilors

Asprer Ray (Philippines)
Bartol Angel (Spain)
Battiston Ruperto (Italy)
Bruschke Klaus (Brazil)
Canzani Francisco (Uruguay)
Dijkema Enno (Holland)
Kenfack Etienne (Cameroon)
Salimbeni Antonio (Italy)
Schwind Joachim (Germany)
St-Hilaire Marc (Canada)
Valtr Vit (Czechia)



ASSEMBLEA GENERALE
DIARIO 12

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DIARY 12

Final document: work in progress

General Assembly – Diary12, February 5, 2021

A very intensive day of work has come to an end for the General Assembly participants.

Between yesterday and today they analysed and voted on a number of motions about the future life of the Movement. A first draft of the final document has also been written. This summarises the orientations and the plan of action on the topics discussed in the various working groups.

It needs to be said that time constraint and the technical conditions imposed by the telematic mode posed a challenge for the Assembly's work. Nonetheless, every effort has been made to enable everyone to contribute, to experience unity in diversity, and to plan together a final document to be handed over to the new Government.

Roughly, it has been calculated that 13 to 15 hours of work were put into each topic and a total of 3,500 working hours

were invested in the first draft alone. All this work has been achieved through the help of several specialised platforms and three professional facilitators.

An extraordinary appointment for tomorrow morning: Pope Francis will receive the General Assembly in a private audience at the Paul VI Hall. Some participants will actually participate in person, while most of them will follow via streaming.

The outgoing president, Maria Voce, will introduce the newly elected Margaret Karram to the Holy Father. The new president will address Pope Francis, who will then speak to those present and to the Assembly participants who will follow through the link-up.

Detailed information about the live broadcast, that all may follow.

*Focolare Communications Office
February 5, 2021*





Foto © Vatican Media

Transforming suffering into a source of hope

The Pope receives in audience the participants of the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement and talks about how to face the post-founding time, the importance of crises, how to live the spirituality with coherence and realism.

PRESS RELEASE –6ST FEBRUARY 2021

This morning Pope Francis received in private audience the 362 participants of the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement, a representation of whom were present in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican and with the majority connected via internet.

Welcoming them, he extended his greetings to all members of the Focolare Movement. He encouraged them to remain faithful to the original source of their charism while remaining in dialogue with new social and cultural situations. He invited them to beware of any self-absorption, to see every crisis as an opportunity to grow, to be witnesses of fraternal love that overcomes all barriers and to increasingly promote synodality. He concluded with an invitation to remain, in imitation of the foundress Chiara Lubich, attentive to the cry of abandonment of Christ on the cross, the heart of Christianity and of the charism of Focolare.

After the death of the founder – the Pope explained in his speech – the Movement is called to overcome the natural bewilderment and also a decrease in numbers. “Every charism is creative, it is not a statue in a museum, no, it is creative. It is a question of remaining faithful to the original source, striving to rethink it and express it in dialogue with the new social and cultural situations. It is firmly rooted, but the tree grows in dialogue with reality. This task of updating is all the more fruitful the more it is carried out by harmonizing creativity, wisdom, sensitivity to all and fidelity to the Church. Your spirituality, characterized by dialogue and openness to different cultural, social and religious contexts, can certainly encourage this process. Openness to others, whoever they may be, must always be cultivated: the Gospel is meant for everyone, but not by proselytism, no, it is meant for everyone, it is a leaven of new humanity in every place and time.”

The Pope warned against self-absorption “which never comes from the good spirit, is our hope for the whole Church: to beware of self-centredness, which always leads to defending the institution to the detriment of individuals, and which can also lead to justifying or covering up forms of abuse. ... Instead, it is better to be courageous and to face problems with parrhesia and truth, always following the indications of the Church. ... Self-celebration does no good service to the charism. No. Rather, it is a matter of welcoming each day with wonder – don’t forget wonder always indicates the presence of God – the freely-given gift you have received by meeting your ideal of life and, with God’s help, trying to correspond to it with faith, humility and courage, like the Virgin Mary after the Annunciation.”

He then went on to the second theme, emphasizing the importance of crises which are an opportunity to grow. A crisis “is a time of the Spirit, which arouses the need to update, without becoming discouraged in the face of human complexity and its contradictions. ... It is the task of those responsible for governance, at all levels, to work to address in the best and most constructive way, communitarian and organizational crises; instead the spiritual crises of individuals, which involve the intimacy of the individual and the sphere of conscience, must be dealt with prudently by those who do not hold positions of governance, at all levels, within the Movement. ... The intermingling of the sphere of governance and the sphere of conscience gives rise to abuses of power and the other abuses we have witnessed, once the cauldron of these unpleasant problems has been uncovered.”

To accomplish unity to which the Focolare is particularly called, the Pope indicates a twofold perspective: “With regard to acting outside the Movement and within it, I encourage you to be witnesses of closeness with fraternal love that overcomes every barrier and reaches every human condition. Overcome barriers, do not be afraid! It is the path of fraternal closeness, that transmits the presence of the Risen Christ to the men and women of our time, starting from the poor, the least, the discarded; working together with people of good will for the promotion of justice and peace.” With regards to efforts within the Movement, he

urged the Movement increasingly to promote synodality “so that all members, as depositories of the same charism, may be co-responsible for and participate in the life of the Work of Mary and its specific goals. Those who are responsible for governance are called to foster and implement transparent consultation not only within the governing bodies, but at all levels, by virtue of that logic of communion according to which all can place their gifts and opinions at the service of others, in truth and with freedom.”

And he concluded by reminding the Movement to remain, in imitation of the foundress Chiara Lubich, always listening to Christ’s cry of abandonment on the cross “which manifests the highest measure of love. The grace that comes from it is capable of arousing in us, weak and sinners as we are, generous and sometimes heroic responses; it is capable of transforming suffering and even tragedy into a source of light and hope for humanity. In this passing from death to life lies the heart of Christianity and also of your charism.”

The meeting with Pope Francis was opened by Maria Voce, outgoing President of the Focolare Movement, who

presented the new President Margaret Karram: “We are grateful to the Holy Spirit for having chosen her,” she said, “in the joy of being able to entrust her now to your prayers and to your love, Holy Father, which will certainly be as deep and great as it has been for me during all these years.”

The newly-elected President, who was moved, confided to the Pope that she did not like the word President: “I am a daughter of the Church and I want to be at her service and that of everyone.” She expressed her gratitude for the Pope’s words and actions, which “constantly stimulate us to join the whole People of God in going out to embrace the pain of humanity and to work so that, in our common home, all may look upon and treat each other as brothers and sisters”. She thanked the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life for allowing this General Assembly to be conducted electronically.

Stefania Tanesini
February 6, 2021



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Seeds that must bear fruit

On Sunday 7 February 2021, at the conclusion of the Focolare's General Assembly, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, and Under-Secretary Dr Linda Ghisoni visited the Focolare's International Center at Rocca di Papa. The Cardinal celebrated the closing Mass, and they both participated in the online Link-Up, during which he expressed this greeting to the Focolare communities around the world.



Dear friends belonging to the Focolare Movement, it is with pleasure that I address all of you here present and all those connected by telematic means. First, I would like to thank Dr Maria Voce for her service over these years as President of the Work of Mary. The task of succeeding the foundress Chiara Lubich is not an easy one. It involves taking on the responsibility of guiding the life and apostolate of this vast and richly structured Movement that is now present in many countries of the world and in many spheres, not only ecclesial but also social, academic and cultural.

I thank you for your generous service.

I congratulate the new President, Dr Margaret Karram, who was elected at the Assembly that has just ended, and I wish her wisdom, frankness, prudence and decisiveness in guiding the Focolare Movement in the coming years so that the Work of Mary may increasingly adhere to the great plans that God has in store for all of you. [They are plans] that require your docile and courageous adherence to his will.

Last year you celebrated the centenary of Chiara's birth. Although a hundred years may seem like a very long time, I am convinced that the Movement born from her charism is still in its infancy, as the Holy Father said. I think we can say that Chiara's institutions are seeds that are still waiting to sprout fully and bear the fruits that God wishes.

The new governance leaders, but also all of you members of the Movement, therefore, are fully involved in this great mission of making what has been sown bear fruit.

This Link-up was desired by Chiara herself as an occasion to come together as a family, to reflect together, to make known the initiatives that fulfil each one's commitment, to share joys and common concerns. And above all to return to the fundamental inspirations, the deep spiritual motives that must be at the heart of your whole life and that must never be lost sight of.

This sharing of hearts and lives will help you to rediscover the meaning and joy of belonging to this spiritual family that God has raised up.

I invite you first of all to accept with gratitude and docility the words addressed to you by the Holy Father in yesterday's audience. They are the sure path that the Lord himself marks out for you, for our growth, for our sanctification, for the concrete exercise of ecclesial communion.

The Work of Mary, following the charism that is proper to it, aspires to achieve an ever-deeper unity within itself, within the Church, among Christians and among all people. In pursuing this goal, which is so central to the Movement, it is important to ensure the right amount of freedom and personal autonomy within each Focolare and within all the other areas of association and governance in your Movement. Therefore, do not be afraid to give space to parrhesia, to speaking frankly with one another, listening to everyone. You know very well that unity does not mean uniformity; it means achieving a communion in the image of divine [communion], which preserves differences, enhances them and leads them back to a higher union that manifests the richness of all.

Dear friends, I would like to assure you that the Church has great confidence in you, as the Popes have always shown throughout the history of the Movement. [The Church] admires and supports the evangelical spirit that animates you, appreciates the abundant fruits that have come forth from you over the years, the religious awakening of so many lay people, the many lives consecrated to God, the vocations to the priesthood and to married life, the countless works of apostolate that you carry out with passion and competence. And above all, the incalculable testimonies of holiness by the men and women focolarini who have lived and are living exemplary lives, being as it were Christian yeast for the Church and society in so many regions of the world.

For so many reasons the Church will always take care to accompany you with her maternal receptiveness and with the paternal vigilance of her authority to support you on the path of growth.

May the Lord bless you, protect you and make you grow in unity and love. Thank you all.

*S. E. Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell
February 7, 2021*



The courage to embrace the suffering of humanity

Today 7th February the General Assembly of the Focolare has ended with a document which invites the members of the Movement in all the world. to make themselves close to “those who don’t matter or those who live in under privileged situations”.

Beginning from “Listening to the cry of humanity, of creation and of the new generations” and from “the embrace of every kind of suffering and disunity” we have the starting point for the orientations that have been developed by the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement, for the next 6 years. In fact, the final document which was produced by the Assembly and approved in today’s final session has as its title: “A road map”.

It’s a document that begins with a message that is clear and strong: in line with their calling to take unity where there isn’t unity, the members of the Focolare Movement commit themselves first and foremost, “to seek out those who suffer, those who are excluded, beginning from those whom we ourselves have made suffer or have excluded” and “to be in dialogue with all men and women, to let ourselves be touched by the other, to have a preference for those whom we perceive as being more different from us”.

The action plans are born from the desire to live even more in closeness with “those who don’t matter, those who live in underprivileged situations or suffer systematically” and they are a call to all the adherents of the Focolare to adopt a style of life which is humble, moderate and with commitment in every environment. Our desire is “to act more as ‘living networks’, that are enriched with relationships of trust and to collaborate with anyone who is involved in working for the same goals.” A priority of our focus will be the reality of the family, “as the first cell of society”; it should be “favored and valued in its actions as a social and political subject”.

With “deep sorrow” the General Assembly asks for forgiveness from the victims “of any abuse whether physical, sexual, of authority or of conscience”. And so as not to remain vague or unclear, the new President of the Focolare, Margaret Karram, together with the re- elected Copresident, Jesus Moran, has presented to the Assembly a program of actions containing 4 points. These go from the revision of the bodies and the processes of enquiry into abuse, to the re-examination of all abuse cases – of whatever kind – that have come or will come to our knowledge.

At the end of the Assembly. The new President Margaret Karram – supported by a world -wide, on line applause -expressed her gratitude to the former President, Maria Voce, for her commitment, her intelligence and the spiritual depth with which she has led the Movement in the last 12 years. And she encouraged everyone to remain constantly attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to give witness to the joy that is born from living the Gospel with enthusiasm.

At the conclusion of the Assembly, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, together with the Undersecretary Linda Ghisoni, came to visit the International Center of the Focolare at Rocca di Papa. In his homily during the Mass of thanksgiving, Cardinal Farrell reminded us of what Pope Francis recommended, in the private audience that was granted yesterday to the Assembly: “that moments of crisis, both personal and communitarian, if they are lived well and with discernment, can also be a gift and can bring great benefits. They re- dimension us, they knock down our pride, our futile self-security.” Pope Francis encouraged the Movement to “return continuously to the purity of Chiara Lubich’s charism, that is to turn to the beauty of a personal relationship with Jesus, that is sincere and total.”

*Focolare Communications Office
February 7, 2021*