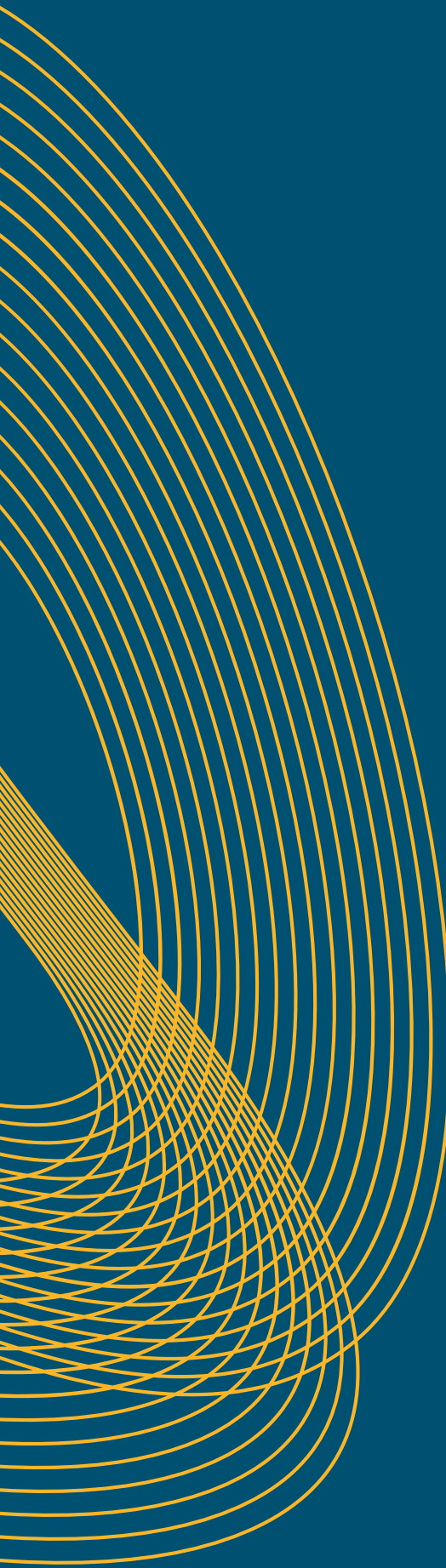


AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

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A large, abstract graphic on the left side of the cover, composed of numerous thin, concentric, overlapping orange lines that form a dynamic, swirling shape.

# ONGOING AND INTEGRAL FORMATION IN THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

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# PREMISE

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AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

**The Focolare Movement (FM)** is an associative organisation founded in 1943 in the Roman Catholic Church, to which also people of various Churches and all faiths belong. A people born from the Gospel that embraces all ages and walks of life.

## *Recipients*

This document is addressed to those people involved in the field of education:

- in the various branches and formation agencies of the FM
- in one's own Church or Christian community
- in one's own religion
- in society

Although we are aware that we are still in the early stages of reflection and implementation, this document is also addressed to those committed to other bodies and organisations, involved in formation as a stimulus for mutual exchange and enrichment.

## *Aims*

This document would like to offer:

- a summary of the general outline of the FM's commitment to formation
- an initial list of the numerous and varied formation experiences addressed to those belonging to the FM and the schools and cultural and educational agencies set up by the Movement in the most diverse contexts
- a document in progress, which is open, to be enriched and to be connected to one's own task as a formator who is willing to work as part of a network

This document does not attempt to offer:

- a historical-critical analysis of the FM's formation commitment
- a complete collection of what is being done for formation today as FM all over the world
- a handbook of the science of education in the light of the Charism of Unity

# CONTEXT AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

« *It was a time of war...* », this is how [Chiara Lubich](#)'s story of the founding of the FM often began. It was not just a historical setting of the event but the awareness that in that precarious condition was the moment to perceive the meaning of life, to open oneself to a truth that went beyond the tragic nature of the condition in which they found themselves.

The beginning and the development of this ecclesial movement, also characterised by a strong educational importance, were intertwined with the personal history of the foundress

### Educational event

Our Movement and our history can be seen as a great, extraordinary educational event<sup>1</sup>.

of the Focolare Movement. Indeed, Chiara Lubich had been a teacher from 1939 to 1943, both in a primary school and in accompanying those aspiring to be part of the Italian Catholic Action and the novices of the Franciscan Third Order of Trent. Therefore, it was spontaneous to refer to the experience she was living with her first companions, defining it as a “school” and referring to Jesus as the model of the teacher.

With the deepening of spiritual values, the progressive worldwide diffusion and the structuring of the Movement, over the years, a diverse range of formation programmes have

been generated both within and outside the FM. This saw significant recognition with the awarding to Chiara Lubich of an honorary Doctorate in Education at the University of Washington D.C. on the 10th of November 2000<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See C. Lubich, *Lesson for the honorary degree in Education*, American Catholic University, Washington D.C., 10 November 2000, in Chiara Lubich Centre – University Institute Sophia (ed.), *Honorary Doctorate conferred to Chiara Lubich*, Città Nuova, Roma 2016.

The quotes in the boxes are taken from this lesson, unless specified differently.

The richness and variety of spiritual insights offered by this charism which is centred on unity means that the resulting educational experience follows in the footsteps of **Christian education**, anchored in the patristic tradition. Each of the points can be read not only from a theological and experiential point of view, but also as the possibility of giving rise to fruitful pedagogical research hypotheses, which could contribute to a coherent theory with innovative aspects.

The discovery that **God is love** is definitely the cornerstone for building a Gospel-based life that is founded and structured as a response to Love with love.

From the outset, this entails becoming aware that love is not an abstract and generic feeling, a mere inner attitude, but a tangible commitment, in the awareness that the encounter with people is also an encounter with Jesus who asks and is waiting to be loved.

A Gospel passage that characterises the developing spirituality is that of *Matthew 18:20*: **“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them”**, which envisages the historical implementation of the presence of Jesus among his people, an enlightening presence of the One who presents himself as teacher, the way, the truth and the life.



# GENERAL AIMS

## AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

The goal of all our formation activities is "to contribute to the **unity** and **fraternity** of the entire human family"<sup>2</sup>.

We may ask ourselves: how can we educate to fraternity, in an era characterised by rising inequalities, tensions, wars and terrorism, by a social, economic and cultural crisis that affects different countries and continents across the board?

### The purpose

What is the purpose of this educational process? Ours is the same purpose that Jesus had, which we might define as his educational purpose: "That all may be one": unity, therefore, deep and heartfelt unity with God and among all human beings.

The testimonies we receive are not only from the so-called frontline areas but also from the daily challenge of educating in the family, in the classroom or in society, and they often talk to us about uneasiness. Despite the encouraging signs that we are seeing in tackling common problems, there are in fact new forms of individualism being generated in different parts of the world. In the society of information and communication, paradoxically, the sense of alienation and fragmentation have increased, so much so that our era has been defined as an age of uncertainty and of new individual identities that are undermining established institutional and cultural forms as well as the transmission of values.

The **formation goals**, and the skills derived from them, must look at these challenges with hope and seriousness and are obviously intertwined with the aims for which the FM was founded and lives.

<sup>2</sup> See Work of Mary, *General Statutes*, 2007, art. 6.

The formation process begins with an encounter with the **Educator par excellence, God-Love**, who accompanies each person throughout life, enabling them to experience the strength that comes from knowing that they are children who are loved, and brothers and sisters with one another, each with an immense dignity. Even those who do not identify themselves in a religious experience can, in following their conscience and in dialogue with others, experience a bond with something that transcends them and binds them to the whole of humanity.

‘Does anyone love me?’: this is the continuous, ever new question that the new generations ask the adult generation, expressing the deepest existential need of every person: that of being loved. This means returning into ourselves, going back to our origin, because, since our childhood, we need to be accepted in order to exist.

The close link between **thought and life** is another of the goals that characterise the formation process. The very high dignity of each person is nourished by a continuous commitment to come out of ourselves, to let ourselves be guided by a well-formed conscience and the voice of God to which we are freely called to respond. A conscience that spurs us to actions that generate **community life, social and political commitment**, to contribute to the construction of a united and peaceful world, in which each person can be recognised and can develop their possibilities to live together and collaborate.



# THE PROTAGONISTS OF FORMATION

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## AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

Looking back at the journey that has enabled the FM to create a path of ongoing formation in these decades, three key players are evident:

- **the individuals in formation** with a special focus on the new generations and those in the process of joining one of the various branches of the FM
- **the formators**, who are themselves chosen and trained with specific skills according to the service they are entrusted with. Among these:
  - there are those who are more advanced in the journey and with mature experience. They can therefore provide a coordinating role in the group to which they belong
  - there are the educating communities that, with the experience gained over time, have replaced individual formators with teams of people
  - there are the various generations who, even collectively, feel a responsibility to form the next generation
  - there are those who have specific duties for the promotion of integral and ongoing formation
- **the relationship** between those involved in the formation process takes on the role of a third key player:
  - it is a relationship of communion, the terrain through which and in which personal and group growth develops; it is the setting in which the formation process lives; it is the guarantee of a progressive, balanced and integral growth for each person
  - the fruit of an authentic relationship is a unity that does not mean a unifying model but includes a plurality of voices. This requires the careful consideration of the contribution that each person, freely and in a spirit of love and collaboration, can make in the different situations and in the communitarian listening to the Word of God

The educational process, generated by this relationship, is implemented according to the principles of fullness, that is, giving everything to everyone, and gradualness, so that everything can be understood at every age according to one's abilities. By always respecting the different stages of the person's development, capable of ever-new amazement, a full protagonism of the person is encouraged. In this perspective, caring cannot be defined as an action of shaping the other into an asymmetrical relationship, but into a reciprocity that bypasses differences of age, *status*, culture, responsibility, and in which, to educate is to educate oneself.

At the heart of the special attention that the FM has always dedicated to the new generations is the concept of the very high dignity of each person at all stages of life, in imitation of Jesus who did not differentiate between people and especially valued children, who in his time were not valued.

Nonetheless, historical social conditions and personal contradictions have sometimes led to the absolutization of certain roles, and even within the FM there have been situations of rigidity of roles to the point of extreme cases of abuse of power over consciences or attitudes of self-referentiality.

Chiara Lubich herself repeatedly made it clear that formation roles must always be interpreted in a logic of alternating, mutual listening and love, and that the

purpose of the FM is to live for others. But, in spite of this, mistakes have been made, and it is everyone's task to come to terms with these contradictions and collectively assume responsibility for mutual attention so that the formation process is always correct and generative of the person, the community and its relationship with the context.

### The soul has no age

Said Chiara Lubich regarding **children**:  
«it is neither young nor old. It's always a soul. ... Don't look down on the children from above, but from Jesus to Jesus»<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Lubich, Loppiano 19 August 1966



# KEY CONTENTS

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## AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

At the core of the contents of the different formation courses run by the FM (according to age, culture, type of membership of the Movement), the charism of unity offers a range of elements that characterise it and stimulate ideas for those who undertake the formation course.

These principles are based on the **love taught by the Gospel**, which has brought to light the key points of the spirituality of unity which, like the entire Gospel message, have a universal significance. In a close connection between thought and life, the many ways of embodying this spirituality in all aspects of the person are also highlighted: the physical, cognitive, affective, social and spiritual aspects, and of life according to the “seven aspects” explained below.

Only a new and original experience lived in the first person can help each one to discover how much truth, goodness and beauty are present in the Gospel and the riches which are contained in what the Second Vatican Council calls the seeds of the Word, present in every culture, in every thinker.

## *The key points*

From the outset, the FM has been characterised as a spirituality of communion, as a path of personal and collective growth. Over the course of time, Chiara developed this spirituality into **12 key points**:

- 1 God Love, chosen as the ideal of our life
- 2 The Will of God as a response to His love
- 3 The Word of God lived out and the sharing of relevant experiences
- 4 Love of neighbour, as Jesus taught in the Gospel
- 5 Mutual love
- 6 Jesus in the Eucharist as daily nourishment
- 7 The Unity Jesus asked of the Father
- 8 Jesus crucified and forsaken as the key to achieve unity
- 9 Mary, mother of unity
- 10 The Church-communion
- 11 The Holy Spirit, the voice to be listened to
- 12 Jesus in the midst, present according to His promise

All the key points refer to and illuminate each other: they cannot be fully understood and lived if not as a whole. Each element is included in the others, is presupposed by the others and is, at the same time, their consequence. These are principles that aim to open every person who draws close to this spirituality, to its newness, and which at the same time - as can be read in the further insights - can inspire an integral and ongoing formation path which naturally is to be adapted to the contexts and recipients.

## *Integral education*

### The seven aspects of life

The integral formation to which we refer is inspired by an intuition of Chiara Lubich and the organisation of the life of the FM in its early days. In a figurative way, an image of light splitting into the seven colours of the rainbow was used, matching the different colours with the various aspects of life. Just as under each colour of the rainbow there is the fullness of light, expressed in red, orange, yellow, etc., so under each aspect there is the whole of life, expressed in that particular way:

- communion of goods, economy and work – red
- witness and outreach – orange
- spirituality and prayer life – yellow
- nature and physical life – green
- harmony and environment – blue
- wisdom and study – indigo
- unity and means of communication – violet

#### **What is education?**

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It can be defined as the itinerary that those being educated (the individual or community) undertake, with the help of the educator(s), towards what one should be, an aim that is considered valid for the human being and for humanity.

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# THE METHOD

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## AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

Each formation entity or agency adopts adequate up-to-date methods suited to the age and culture of the people it addresses. This document summarises only the basic ideas born from life and the experience of these years. And it is precisely life itself that offers a basic educational aspect: in giving oneself to others, in working together for those in need, one lives that 'head, heart and hands' which is one of the formation principles that characterises the FM's educational project.

The unique educational experience of the **relationship with Jesus**, the educator par excellence, is what Chiara proposed as a method. This is a method that stems from experience, and it frees us from depending even on teachers, placing the person, in an active and responsible manner, at the centre of their formation process and offering them the code of this new life: the Gospel.

## *Art of loving*

The dual focus on transcendence and relationship with other human beings characterises all religions and is expressed in different ways by the so-called Golden Rule.

This is how Judaism understands it: «Do to no one what you yourself dislike» (Tb 4:15). Islam: «None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself» (Hadith 13, Al Bukhari). Hinduism: «Do not do to others what would cause you pain if done to you» (Mahabharata 5: 1517). Christianity: «Do to others as you would have them do to you» (see Lk 6:31). This is the key to every relationship and finds its full expression in Jesus' request to love our enemy and to love one another as he has loved us. In these two indications lies the root of what Chiara Lubich calls the **art of loving**.

It is a challenging and demanding art, which wants to go beyond the narrow horizon of love usually directed at family and friends so as to address it, without distinction or prejudice, to all people. This way of loving has a strong pro-social characteristic: it encourages people to take the first step, it considers the other person as oneself, it encourages openness to perceiving the emotional states of others while maintaining a different sense of self. This art of loving, which is lived by many people, then leads to **mutual love**, the pearl of the Gospel: Jesus' new commandment, which builds unity.

### A wide-ranging dialogue

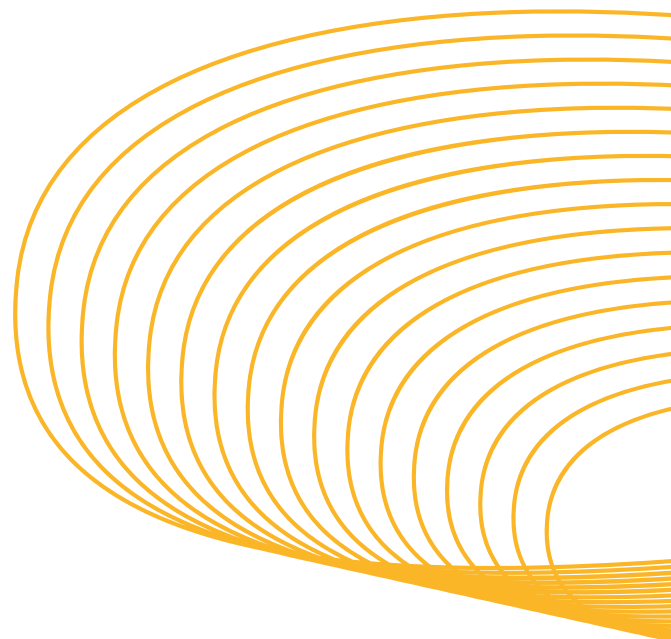
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We can only achieve collaboration, dialogue and encounters with other people and other movements, etc. through serious education, both as individuals and as a community.

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For Chiara Lubich, to live and spread this art starting from the youngest is the method so that education can truly be that process, which is aimed at the maximum achievement, in all its dimensions, of each person's potential. By studying these in depth we can discover a widespread method used in the various educational centres of the FM to promote positive relational experiences: **the cube of love**.

The art of loving is the main path required of those who believe in and are committed to dialogue in all its expressions. In fact, dialogue requires learning by living and experiencing what has been learnt; not only with intelligence, but also with the heart, by loving. In loving, first we learn tolerance, then deep respect for the other, for cultures, religions, nature, until we come to the welcoming of different ideas in order to build true relationships between brothers and sisters. Loving in dialogue leads to discernment. Knowledge experienced in this way unifies people within themselves and maximises all their faculties.



## *The phases of the process*

The accompaniment of the growth process also takes place by looking at the **life of Mary**, discovering in it the image of the journey that every woman and every man undertakes on this earth. Looking at the different moments of Mary's life, which are presented in the Gospel, we can perceive different stages to which each person, in the various moments of life, can look for light and encouragement.

Chiara Lubich illustrates the stages of the journey of those who belong to the FM, but the elements that characterise each of these can also be useful to those who want to find a thread that links the important moments of their own and others' life.

Therefore, Mary is the model for every moment of life, and looking at her path is a valuable indication for planning every formation path, which should take into account the progression of the stages and the importance of accompanying each one, with the delicacy of knowing that they are on a journey that is sacred.

## *Instruments*

The account that is given of the life that emerged from the charism of unity in the early days retraces certain practices that, considered decades later, still appear to be essential instruments for a qualitatively enriching coexistence for all and for overcoming the inevitable difficulties of a shared journey.

Since the spiritual life of the Work of Mary is personal and communitarian at the same time, the people of the FM proceed together on the path towards holiness. They therefore put into practice, as best they can, the typical "**instruments**" needed to maintain and increase their union with God, namely: the pact of mutual love, the communion of souls, the sharing of life experiences of the Word of God, the moment of truth and the private conversation with the people who are responsible for them.

# PLACES AND METHODS OF FORMATION

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AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

Loving illuminates a path that responds to a deep need and desire for community, a commitment that can come about by giving life to a true educational community, one that proposes an alternative model of coexistence to that of a standardized or individualistic society, one that gives space to an *anthropology of reciprocity*. A community that generates a vital network of relationships and a space for communion, as wisely expressed by the African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.”

It is clear that formation takes place within a framework of relationships and in a specific environment that has characteristics that help build an atmosphere suitable for people's human and cultural growth.

Inaugurating a summer course for young people, the foundress of the Focolare Movement wanted to propose an image of the place where that course was being held, a classroom, not so much made of bricks, but of relationships. These refer to the relationship par excellence, that of the Holy Trinity:

What should the true, ideal classroom be for a school of this kind? I have no doubts! The classroom that will guarantee the wisdom that we want to have is one alone: **the bosom of the heavenly Father**. We must be worthy to enter there and make it our permanent dwelling place. The charism that has been given to us makes this possible. And even when you leave this room made of walls, you must never leave that classroom, because that, I believe, would lead to the failure of this School. If, by any chance you should happen to go out of that classroom [the bosom of the Father], you should return to it immediately<sup>4</sup>.

What the formation programme offers, as will be explored in more detail in the following pages, proposes varying times of commitment according to the characteristics of each course. They range from annual or multi-year courses to more sporadic commitments; with frequencies that could be weekly, monthly (such as the appointment to share experiences on the Word of Life), annual and five-yearly (linked to the internal planning of the FM which holds its General Assembly every 5 years).

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<sup>4</sup> C. Lubich, *Inaugural talk of the Institute of Higher Learning [Sophia Summer School] “For a Culture of Unity”* (15 August 2001), in «Sophia», 1 (2008/0) p. 26.

Retracing the **historical thread**, we will give brief outlines of the places where the formation of the people who gradually were adhering to this new way of life was developed.

### The focolare

From the very beginning, the life that linked Chiara and her first companions led them to live together in a small apartment in Piazza Cappuccini in Trent. This is how the first focolare began, without any planning. This experience, the nucleus and driving force of an early community, went on to multiply throughout the world as a living together of consecrated persons living in community and married people, both in men's and women's focolares.

### The local communities

As the Ideal of unity spread to different cities and towns, **local communities** were formed around the focolares. These communities include people of all ages and states of life and bear witness to fraternity and equality among all, with the sharing of the Gospel that they lived as their foundation. In them, they are recognised as being of one heart and one soul following the model of the **first Christian communities**. They include all the branches of the FM in its diversity (families, children, teenagers, young people, men and women focolarini, people involved in the different areas of society, the men religious and consecrated women, priests, people of all religions and convictions) putting into practice intergenerational, interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In this way, they testify that unity is possible and that it is possible to be a family, where love and co-responsibility are lived. The local community is therefore an **educating community**.



### The Mariapolis and the little towns

The Mariapolis, literally “city of Mary,” has been the Focolare Movement's most characteristic and open event since the 1950s. In it, people of different ages and backgrounds come together for several days to experience a workshop of fraternity, in the light of the universal values of the Gospel and having as a guideline the *Golden Rule* - which invites you to do to others what you would like to be done to yourself. They are days to experience how it is possible to live in daily life, by making listening, gratuitousness, giving and joy the basis of every relationship, but also to look in depth at current issues and the spirituality of the charism of unity. Since the 1960s, this experience has become ongoing in the **permanent Mariapolis**, that is, little towns inserted in a given area: the first was in Grottaferrata (Rome), then in Loppiano (Florence) and then in many countries around the world. The formation dimension is one of the characteristic features of these little towns where members of the FM spend a period of time for specific formation in the Charism in all its dimensions, building relationships and combining thought and life.

### The Mariapolis Centres

Since the 1980s, these structures have developed where courses, conferences and congresses are held through which members of the FM are formed. Initiatives and events are also held there in collaboration with other ecclesial and social realities. These centres, despite being a place that temporarily hosts many people, they maintain the character and atmosphere of a home.

### Small group meetings for reciprocal formation

Each person who belongs to the FM is part of a group, according to their specific vocation or the branch to which they belong. These groups meet regularly and are nourished by the spiritual and cultural legacy of the Work of Mary. During these meetings people are updated, help each other to put the Word of God into life, share experiences and put into practice the instruments of the collective spirituality (see above).



### The large-scale events

Since the 1970s, highly effective one-off meetings have been the large events or conferences with a high number of participants. These are moments that wanted and want above all to be a celebration of fraternity, an open expression and a wide-ranging sharing of the goals of the FM. The main aim of these events is to make visible the desire for a united world, an expression that highlights universal fraternity as a viable project. These large-scale events are always part of an ongoing formation process.

### The Projects

These are educational projects with social commitment proposed and organised by the section of the young people and teenagers. Here they can put into practice the spirit of fraternity on a daily basis in the light of living the Gospel, giving life to initiatives of care and concern for people and for the environment through generous service for others.

The **Hombre-Mundo Project**, for example, is designed and implemented specifically by teenagers. Through local and global initiatives, it fosters knowledge between different cultures and religions, develops active citizenship, and strengthens the teenagers' commitment to the planet's great challenges, from those of the environment to the elimination of hunger and poverty.

### The e-learning digital platforms

The foundress always considered the means of communication to be an integral part of the life of the FM. Looking at the formation aspect, in recent decades, platforms have been developed dedicated to the formation of formators (for example, the EduxEdu and FormaT programmes - see below), to catechetical, theological and cultural formation (such as the Popular Marian University - see below) and to the different stages of formation of the men and women focolarini around the world. These new possibilities place technology at the service of learning and enable international and multilingual formation by promoting collaboration at a distance between people from different parts of the world.



## Educational agencies

Numerous educational agencies have enriched the educational framework of the Focolare Movement over the years, thanks also to:

- the study and research that characterises the **Abba School** - an international and interdisciplinary centre of life and studies founded by Chiara in 1990 and now including 300 experts in various disciplines, dedicated to explaining and developing the doctrine rooted in the charism of unity
- the cultural and informative contribution of **Città Nuova** (New City) - a publishing group founded in the 1950s in Italy (today present in 35 countries, with 26 editions in 22 languages). Its aim is to spread a culture linked to the values of dialogue and inclusion through a rich variety of books, magazines, platforms, services and technologies.

A list which is non-exhaustive is given here, but it gives an idea of the variety and development which reflects the educational practices, inviting those who wish to explore further, to use the links that refer to the websites of the various realities.

These agencies have been listed according to a categorisation that divides them into:

- **formal agencies**, characterised by an organised and structured context in an officially recognised institution
- **non-formal agencies**, characterised by planned activities, without institutional recognition
- **informal agencies**, related to learning that comes from experience.



## FORMAL AGENICES

### University Institute Sophia (UIS)

It is an academic education and research centre established in 2008, where life and thought come together. Its mission is to provide an open and articulated vision of knowledge, the ability to connect the different sciences by putting their methods into dialogue with each other and integrating their results; to educate young people prepared to face the complexity of today's world in a transdisciplinary perspective in order to generate innovative solutions; to promote dialogue between cultures in the practicalities of social life, boosting people's inner, intellectual and social growth in a dynamic of reciprocity.

For several years now, **Sophia's** academic activity has also been developing in **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** ([University Institute SOPHIA LAC](#)), offering educational spaces to contribute to the construction of a just, fraternal and solidarity-based society in this part of the world.

In harmony with Sophia's formation project and academic method, the **Evangelii Gaudium Centre** (CEG) is a formation, study and research workshop whose mission is to promote and support formation, study and research in the fields of ecclesiology, pastoral and mission theology, spiritual theology and the theology of charisms.

Nursery schools, animated or supported by the Movement with the aim of forming children in peace and hope, have been established in some of the countries that resulted from the collapse of Yugoslavia: in **Slovenia** ([Sončni žarek](#) in Stara Loka, founded in 2003 and active until 2024; Jurček in Grosuplje, founded in 2011), in **Croatia** ([Zraka sunca](#) in Križevci, founded in 1995), in **Serbia** (Fantasy in Belgrade, founded in 1991), in **Macedonia** (Biseri in Skopje, founded in 2007 and active until 2023).

Over time, several schools have been established, supported and animated through a number of organisations and non-profit organisations, such as AFN or AMU, to respond to the specific needs related to social development. In the Middle East there is a school in **Lebanon** (the [IRAP](#)) and a kindergarten and after-school centre in **Syria**; in **Argentina** there is the Aurora School in [Santa María de Catamarca](#) and the Chiara Lubich School in Buenos Aires; in **Brazil** there are the [Santa Maria](#), [Magnificat](#) and [Fiore](#) Schools, the [Santa Terezinha](#) educational centre, the [Maria bambina Centre](#); in **Bolivia** and **Venezuela** there are educational and social centres. And then there are other schools in **Colombia**, **Guatemala**, **Mexico** and the **Dominican Republic**. In Africa there are schools in the [Central African Republic](#) and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**; and in Asia in the [Philippines](#) and in **India**.

## NON-FORMAL AGENCIES

### Popular Marian University (UPM)

Founded and inaugurated by Chiara Lubich on the 15th of October 1980, it consists of multi-year courses entrusted to different teams of teachers. Due to the inclusive nature of this university, the texts of the lessons are universal and accessible to all. Each year of study concludes with final assessments/discussions which are moments of communion according to the spirituality of unity.

The FM also offers specific formation courses for those belonging to its various branches.

As a continuation of the *Mystici Corporis Institute* founded in [Loppiano](#) (Florence) in 1964 in response also to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, **formation schools** for people belonging to the Movement and coming from different geographical and cultural areas have been developing in the little towns throughout the world (e.g. in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico...). These are for young people, families, priests, men religious and consecrated women, laymen and laywomen involved in many social fields.

**Hubs of formation and accompaniment** for the consecrated members of the FM developed in Loppiano, in the Americas, in Asia and in various other parts of the world with teams of professionals in various disciplines (from spiritual accompaniment to psychological accompaniment, from sociology to the care of the body) who focus on the whole person and the community.

Specific attention is given to **families** through regular appointments and courses run by [New Families](#), with a special focus on couples in crisis, widows and widowers, separated people, couples in second unions and parents of LGBTQ+ children.

The international and local **Centres** of the **Gen** Movement, Youth for a United World and Teens for Unity offer children ([Gen4](#)), teenagers (T4U and [Gen3](#)) and young people (Y4UW and [Gen2](#)) and the teams who accompany them, formation courses and material, activities and resources, adapted to the different age groups. They support the creation of local and global networks of both the new generations and the adults in a dynamic of communion among the various people involved. They establish networks between the different realities, projects, initiatives, associations, etc. in the context of the new generations for the fulfilment of universal fraternity and to help the young generations to develop within the horizon of an integral formation.

In the [ecclesial context](#), the different branches (the priests, parish and diocesan movements) offer a contribution in the various areas of pastoral care, such as evangelisation, catechesis and formation, in order to contribute, together with the other ecclesial groups, to the implementation of a **Church of communion**, as desired by John Paul II in [Novo Millennio Ineunte](#). The movements for the men religious and the consecrated women also promote initiatives to increase communion through study, discussion, conferences, spirituality weeks, and updating courses that are inspired by the spirituality of unity and the ecclesiology of communion.

The Movement is also involved in **dialogue** between movements and new communities within the *Catholic Church*, in **dialogue** with the various Churches and ecclesial communities (such as "**Together for Europe**"), in the dialogue with believers of *different religious beliefs* and between believers and *people with no religious affiliation*. Dialogue has also been initiated on a cultural level, within different disciplines. Conferences, meetings and formation schools for ecumenical or interreligious dialogue, for research, as well as Summer Schools on specific disciplines for young people are very fruitful in this atmosphere of openness and relationship.

### **Promotion of the welfare and safeguarding of children and adults in situations of vulnerability**

Formation courses organised in a systematic, continuous and accessible manner for all those belonging to the FM and those who collaborate with them in the various activities, providing tools to observe, personally and as a community, the guidelines of the Focolare Movement regarding safeguarding.

## **INFORMAL AGENCIES**

### **Musical groups Gen Verde and Gen Rosso**

Founded in 1966 by Chiara Lubich, they seek to spread the message of building a more just, peaceful, supportive and united world. For years they have been involved in the world of education with programmes and workshops, which have become true peace education projects, reaching thousands of young people every year.

### **Formation commitment in society**

The **Living Peace International Project**: a path to peace education. The project aims to strengthen collaborations and to cooperate with many others around the world to build a 'network' of peace that embraces the earth. In fact, Living Peace is also a platform: there are over 80 international organisations that collaborate with the project, sharing peace initiatives and activities that are proposed to their respective networks. Living Peace International aims to develop in the different environments of learning and of life, the commitment to live peace and to live for peace.

### *Non-profit organisations and NGOs in the social educational field*

The association **AMU** (Action For A United World) is a non-governmental development organisation that since 1986 has been accompanying vulnerable communities on the path to strengthening their potential for development. It is dedicated to providing formation and awareness-raising activities on the topics of development cooperation and global citizenship (interculture, environmental and economic sustainability, human rights). Since 2002, it has been an accredited body at the Italian Ministry of Education for the formation of school personnel on the subjects of globalisation and human rights.

**AFN** (Action for New Families) is an international non-profit association that supports families living in situations of vulnerability and poverty. In the field of education, it works for the promotion of the person and their rights and strives to ensure that the beneficiaries of its actions receive the necessary support at every stage of their growth.

**New Humanity** is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1986 as an expression and the representative of the FM before international organisations. More specifically, it has a presence at the United Nations in its various entities and programmes, such as: ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council - with a General Consultative Status); UNESCO (Organisation for Education, Science and Culture - of which it is a partner); UNEP (Environment Programme) and the Multifaith Consultative Council (for Interreligious Dialogue). In line with the principles of the FM, it is committed to meeting the challenges of today's world and this includes supporting the commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It works to form global citizens through its commitment to peace, human rights, respect, solidarity between peoples and the protection of the earth.



## Ongoing formation programmes and projects

The various branches of the Focolare Movement, although they have a great common heritage that allows for considerable synergies, have over the years developed specific formation programmes according to the various needs of each specific group of people. They are also consolidating formation experiences at an international level aimed at formators or those being formed.

### **FormaT** (formation for formators) & **EduxEdu** (educating oneself to educate)

An international course of ongoing formation for the formators of the new generations; for those who therefore work in the various educational fields such as the family, school, parish and the different associations, both within and outside the FM. The aim of this course is multifaceted:

- support educational teams by offering psycho-pedagogical knowledge and resources
- propose participatory methods
- encourage the sharing of experiences and best practices
- promote dialogue between communities locally and internationally
- create a network of formators who grow together, sharing skills, experiences and methods for accompanying the new generations.

Through an experiential, inductive, and participatory methodological approach, the programme is structured as an integrated educational opportunity, capable of offering spiritual, scientific, and multidisciplinary content. It promotes a profound understanding of the needs and potential of children, adolescents and young people; it encourages collaborative efforts in educational and professional contexts; it supports fraternity practices at both local and global levels; it proposes formation that is active (learning by doing), relational (on the synodal model), and integral (involving mind, heart and hands).

### **Up2Me**

Programme for the formation in affectivity, sexuality and related topics, to foster the harmonious development of children, adolescents and young people in all their dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, relational-social, emotional, biological, historical-environmental. The programme is divided into 3 distinct paths for different age groups: children (4-8 years) with their families, adolescents (9-17 years) - with a parallel path for their parents, young people (18-30 years). Through games, dynamics, multimedia material and specific methods, the tutors and facilitators seek to promote an integral formation of the new generations, in a course where participants become protagonists in making conscious choices and become capable of living positive relationships.

### Milonga Project

International volunteering programme for young people who want to contribute to local and global challenges. It offers opportunities for fraternal, intercultural and quality volunteering to young people aged between 18 and 35, in collaboration with the work of social organisations already operating in different parts of the world. Now also in local and/or group volunteering methods, it offers a programme based on 8 steps, 8 values that lead to fraternity.

### United World Project

It is a programme that aims to inspire, involve and connect those who live and work to build a more united, fraternal and just world, activating a true global workshop of fraternity among those who participate. To do this: it collects and spreads the stories of those people, communities or associations that contribute, through their activities, to building a more united world; it works on the ground with specific projects through local intergenerational hubs, linked together in the world to share good practices and expertise. It promotes fraternity through an annual event that aims to show public opinion that a united world is possible. By systematically sharing the life stories it has collected, as well as the initiatives and projects it carries out, it supports the NGO New Humanity in its work to promote the culture of fraternity at local and international institutions.



# FURTHER INSIGHT

AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER

## The points of the spirituality

Based on the 12 key points, we have developed some educational indications, already partly expressed by Chiara Lubich in her *Lectio magistralis* when she was awarded an honorary doctorate in education<sup>5</sup>, which can help formators in choosing the contents suited to the different situations, according to the principles of fullness, progressiveness and amazement. They are listed below.

### **GOD-LOVE**

God Himself with His Love is seen as the educator par excellence, who guides with an educational intent that recognises human beings in their unique and unrepeatable identity. He teaches responsibility and raises one to the highest dignity of being a child and heir. The experience of being children is a solid point in personal self-esteem and constitutes a strength in terms of human and educational relationships based on respect. The acknowledgement that we are all children of the same Father gives rise to the right to an inclusive and integral education that refers back to the Comenius principle: it is necessary to “teach everything to everyone”.

in relationship with oneself, with others, with society and with God. The life of the Word of God triggers profound changes in personal existence, thereby setting in motion a true educational process.

### **THE WILL OF GOD**

The choice to follow God's will leads to a continuous self-transcendence towards the You that enriches us and sets us free. On the path of personal growth, one moves from a morality which is controlled by others to an autonomous one, characteristic of a mature adult individual. In this phase one follows an internalised moral law, experiencing a perception of freedom.

### **THE WORD OF GOD**

The Gospel has its own educational value - alternative and critical with respect to societies' models - always alive and always new. It is a word that becomes life and therefore generates in the person an existential unity between saying and doing,

### **JESUS FORSAKEN**

The cry of abandonment by the Father constitutes the measure of educational action and indicates to what extent and with what intensity it should be brought ahead. It is the parameter of inclusive education that encompasses all types of fragility and looks

<sup>5</sup> See C. Lubich, *Lesson for the honorary doctorate in Education*.

at all people who have special educational needs. It's the idea that when someone has nothing, they rely completely on others - like a student who depends on the teacher to take responsibility. It indicates the limitless extent of that need and, at the same time, the limitless extent of our responsibility in helping and educating. It is the paradigm of education to what is difficult: it teaches us to see the difficulty, the obstacle, the trial, the commitment, the error, the failure, the suffering, as something to be faced, to be loved, to be overcome. Education to what is difficult as a commitment that involves both the student and the educator.

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## UNITY

Jesus' request: "That all may be one" is presented as an educational goal, as a regulative idea of the pedagogical proposal. Every authentic pedagogy is the bearer of a utopian tension, so the educational process, in this perspective, is seen as a means to approach the utopian goal. The goal of goals is thus constituted in a unifying principle that must surface positively as in the *e-ducere* (the drawing out) of education. Despite the countless tensions in today's world, unity is a dream and a need of the times.

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## JESUS IN THE MIDST

In this pedagogical vision, for which the spiritual and human dimensions interpenetrate and unify, utopia is neither a dream, nor an illusion, nor an unreachable goal: it is among us, and we feel its fruits, when we put into practice the "Where two or three are united in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (see Mt 18:20). This makes the aim, the highest goal, something real.

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## MUTUAL LOVE

It is the full implementation of love in reciprocity and this enables us to experience the fullness of God's life that Jesus gave us. Where reciprocity is implemented, there is a synthesis between the pedagogical application of the education of the person and the building of the community, in which individuals are capable of collaboration, dialogue, and encounter with other people and with other realities. A vision that has significant connections with community education.

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## MARY

Mary is the example and constitutes the model of Christian living, embodying in an exceptional way the pedagogical principles to which reference is made.

## The seven colours

Before our life as Christians was fragmented and as a result was not very attractive. There was the time to pray, the time for apostolic activities, a time to work, and so on. At a certain point we realized that the only thing necessary was to love God. To show him our love we would pray; to tell him that we loved him, we loved our neighbour, or carried out our daily duties, and so on. In this way, the different aspects of our life became one in us<sup>6</sup>.

The seven aspects can also be connected to the various **fields of education**, so that each aspect would correspond to a specific field. So, to the *communion of goods, economy and work* would correspond pro-social education and new ways of understanding the **economy** and the culture of giving; to *witness and outreach*, intercultural education; to *union with God and prayer*, religious and moral education, formation in interiority and spiritual intelligence; to *physical life and nature*, physical and ecological education, integral well-being; to *harmony and the environment*, aesthetic and social education; to *wisdom and study*, education in itself, paths of formation, conditions for learning the values of wisdom; to *unity and means of communication*, education for dialogue and responsible use of the means of communication, media education in general, communication skills for positive transformation of conflicts.

<sup>6</sup> See *Come un arcobaleno [Like a Rainbow]* (text only for internal use of the Focolare Movement), Città Nuova, Roma 1999.



## Cube of love

The cube summarises the points of the art of loving and on its six sides, instead of numbers, it proposes sentences: love everyone, be the first to love, love Jesus in the other, love the other as yourself, love one another, love your enemy. You throw it daily and commit yourself to living the sentence that comes up; you then share your experiences of living that sentence.

There are various wordings, publications and productions using different materials and in different languages.

For example, the **sports** cube (designed as part of the Sports4Peace project), which on its sides suggests: do your best, be honest with yourself and the others, never give up, even when it is difficult, respect everybody, enjoy the success of the others, big aims we can reach only together.

As an aid to motivate people to be educated in respecting the **environment**, there is also the Earth Cube (EcoOne's ecological-cultural initiative) which reads: smile on the world, everything is a gift, the time is now, only what is needed, discover amazing things, we're all connected to keep the planet healthy and sustainable.

Then there is the version for companies, and the one for **peace** education (Living Peace Project): I am the first to love, I love everybody, I love the other person, I listen to the other person, we forgive one another, we love each other.

Everyone, whether big or small, is committed to being a protagonist in living and sharing their own peace-building experiences.



## The Way of Mary

Chiara looked at the stages of Mary's life as pictures that illustrate the characteristics of the path each person takes in their growth; they can therefore be used as a method to understand the challenges and suitable formation proposals for a given moment. Here are a few examples that everyone can learn more about and put into action.

A first event in Mary's life is found at the moment of the **Annunciation**, when the Word becomes flesh in her. For the people of the FM, this stage corresponds to the moment when they discover and make the charism of unity their own. On the formation journey it corresponds to the choice to offer a new formation proposal and to always know how to renew it, trusting in the presence of the voice of God and in one's conscience.

The second episode in Mary's life is her **visit to Elizabeth**, when she describes her extraordinary experience in the words of the Magnificat. Those who know the FM, and choose God as the ideal of their lives, feel that they must begin to love. And they do love. But love is light and helps them to re-read their own life experience, the golden thread that runs through it, and to want to share it with others. Being able to look at their own life with its joys and wounds and knowing how to narrate it marks an important stage in the process of growth.

The third event in Mary's life is the **birth of Jesus**. In the FM, we love and are loved, and this mutual love can generate the presence of Jesus among people (see Mt 18:20); a presence that sustains, that enlightens, that gives strength, and that fosters global and harmonious growth.

Another event is the **presentation of Jesus in the temple**; there Mary meets the elderly Simeon who says to her: "And a sword will pierce your own soul, too". Those who want to live the spirituality of the FM also go through a similar moment, when they discover that a yes to the cross is necessary to be able to follow this path. It is the proclamation of the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken as essential to the life of unity. Every path of growth has its difficulties, and it is necessary to prepare to know how to deal with them from an early age.

The suffering that was announced soon manifests itself in the **flight to Egypt**. Even those who try to follow an ideal are faced with obstacles or criticism from which, at times, they will have to flee. It is precisely in those moments that loving Jesus crucified and forsaken helps the Risen One continue to shine in our hearts. The educator must be ready to accept the difficulties that their task entails and also to look after those entrusted to them.

The experience which Mary had of **losing Jesus** when, at the age of 12, he stopped in Jerusalem and spoke to the doctors in the Temple, recalls the periods of doubt and temptation. In Jesus' answer to Mary: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?", we find the possibility of discovering behind each crisis a different perspective.

Then there is the **hidden life in Nazareth** and the **public life**, during which Jesus spoke and loved and formed the Church. With this presence of Christ in us and among us, it is possible to become capable of giving life to small and great things for the benefit of humanity.

Continuing on her path we come to the **desolation**, the great, mysterious and overwhelming pain of Mary with which she passes the trial of the abandonment, losing Jesus, or rather seeing him replaced by John. Everyone will sometimes be asked to go through similar ordeals, accepting the suffering of separation from what or from whom they have accompanied with care.



## The instruments of the collective spirituality

In a time of war, they chose to make a **pact** of giving one's life for one another to emphasize the measure that Gospel-based love requires from each one.

Experience then led them to add a pact of mercy to this, which made it possible to see each other as new and to continue the journey despite - and perhaps because of - each other's limitations. Also at the heart of any educational initiative is the need for an agreement, a pact, that ensures authentic mutual relationships and mutual understanding and solidarity among those involved. Tending toward unity, in establishing the community, is therefore not only a goal aimed at achieving peaceful and constructive relations, but is an inherent law in every situation, explaining interpersonal and social relations. A synthesis is thereby implemented between the pedagogical application of the education of the individual and the pedagogical application of building the community.

From the very beginning of the FM - when during the bombing Chiara and her companions found themselves in the shelters, holding only a small Gospel in their hands, which they read by candlelight - the transformative power of the words of the Gospel was understood and they set out to live them, literally.

**Living the Word** produces situations in which we experience that the words of the Gospel are true, that the promises they contain are fulfilled. By living the different Words we have experiences, that is, we gather their fruits in the very fabric of daily life. And it is precisely the focus on the fruits that is another dimension of the formative aspect of living the Word, because it enhances the awareness of meaning and transcendence in one's life.

A communitarian spirituality presupposes that life is communicated. It is about the sharing of experiences: **narrating one's experiences** in the small groups with which one journeys together helps to understand their significance more deeply, enriches those who listen, and helps to create or deepen the relationship between those who give and those who receive. Living the Word and sharing its fruits gives substance to walking together and fosters integral formation, aimed at transforming mind, heart and hands, and therefore, relationships, structures and situations.

Part of this journey together is also the **communion of soul**, through which we share insights, understandings and whatever dwells deepest in the soul in order to put in common the spiritual goods we possess. An example is given to us by Mary when she meets her cousin Elizabeth, and in the "*Magnificat*" the Mother of Jesus, the all humble one, speaks of herself, of what God has worked in her and does so to the glory of God.

The moment of **truth consists** in lovingly offering to our brothers and sisters what we may have observed in their negative and positive actions, in order to correct each other and encourage each other in the way of holiness. It is usually carried out after we have had the opportunity to get to know each other so that we can tiptoe into each other's life.

It is spontaneous and essential for us to see the personal **conversation**, with those who are further ahead on the path than we are, as an opportunity to move forward, while fully respecting privacy and the limits of one's role to avoid any possible abuse of authority or spiritual abuse.



***AT THE SCHOOL OF JESUS THE TEACHER***

