

Word of Life Resources

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Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

We begin this month in the light of **February's Word of Life** "Let all that you do be done in love (1 Cor. 16:14)," which reminds us of how love is the center of a life lived based on the Gospel. In fact, this whole issue focuses on love.

To go **In Depth**, we propose a writing of Chiara entitled: "To Walk in the Way of Love with Love as Our Companion". Remembering how Saint Pope John Paul II told us: "Love is the 'core' of our spirituality."

In the **News**, we reflect on January's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity through a variety of news. First, with a short video of an ecumenical meeting of members of the movement. Then, news about a meeting of the Pope with a Finnish Commission highlighting that "Saints are a source of Unity". An article about the Pope's encounter with the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Commission highlights the need to pray and work for communion.

We conclude with two **experiences** that show how love is contagious and can melt the hearts of those around us.

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

To Walk in the Way of Love with Love as Our Companion

In our Conference Calls, we have spoken over and over again about love, and about love for our neighbors.

It is true; we are called to 'the way of love.' Pope John Paul II, in his visit to our Mariapolis Centre, stated that love is the 'core' of our spirituality.

It is also true that love of neighbor occupies such a place in Christianity that, having accomplished this, we have practically accomplished everything. Nothing we do has value unless it is accomplished in the exercise of love for our neighbor. The saints have solemnly drilled this into our minds. We have become so convinced of this that we desire to conduct our entire lives in this direction.

To walk in the 'way of love', we can choose one of two methods. One is to resolve to love every neighbor that we meet, whether they be our neighbors with whom we work, live, or for whom we pray. The other method is to love Love itself, which for us Christians is manifested and expressed in Jesus crucified and forsaken. To love, therefore, Jesus Forsaken. Experience has shown us that it is better to choose the second way. In fact, if I give my entire heart to Jesus forsaken, he will always be there to give me suggestions on shaping my way of living, to prune my every action of all that is merely human; he will be there to invite me to embrace the fatigue that every task of mine requires and to welcome every little or big suffering 'always, immediately, and with joy' so that it will no longer be I who live, but the risen Christ in me with his Spirit which is always alive.

It is this Spirit, who is alive within me, who will give me the readiness to make myself one and to serve to perfection each neighbor I encounter; and not leave me in peace until I have fulfilled my task in doing so. It is a love

which – as we have said in these past Conference Calls – makes me ‘die’ for my neighbor. It is this Spirit, the Spirit of love, which gives me the greatest hope for my neighbor’s spiritual growth and Christian fulfillment. This Spirit gives me the strength to love those who, in some way, are my enemy, because he suggests that I recognize his countenance also in them. He enriches my heart with mercy so as to know how to forgive and to understand my neighbors’ troubles. He infuses me with the zeal to communicate to my neighbors in an opportune moment the most beautiful things in my soul and to place them in the right disposition to walk more decisively on their holy journey.

Yes, I have seen and experienced that I walk better on the ‘way of love’, having Love, Jesus forsaken, as my ever-present companion. The cross is the focal point of Christianity. Better still, Jesus crucified and risen is all of Christianity.

Let’s go back then to placing Jesus forsaken at the heart of our daily life as the guide to living all our present moments. Let’s go back to repeating: ‘I have only one spouse on earth.’ We will come to the realization that we are walking swiftly on our journey and living in depth the Word of Life that enlightens our month of January, teaching us to be, as God the Father, rich in mercy towards all.

From the book: Conference Calls, New City, UK, published in 2022.

Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Cor. 16:14) ⁱ

This month, the word and experience of the apostle Paul can guide us and be a lamp for our steps.ⁱⁱ

He proclaims a powerful message to us just as he did to the Christians in Corinth; he announces that charity, agape and the selfless love as found among brothers and sisters lie at the heart of the Gospel.

Our Word of Life is part of this letter's conclusion. It frequently refers to the importance of charity and explains it in all its nuances: it is patient, benevolent, loves truth, and does not seek its own interests.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mutual love lived out in this way in the Christian community is the balm for the divisions that always threaten it and is a sign of hope for all humanity.

Let all that you do be done in love.

It is striking that in the Greek text, Paul exhorts us to act as a consequence of "being in love," as if to direct us towards a permanent state of being - a dwelling in God who is Love. For how can we welcome each other, how can we be open towards each person we meet if we do not acknowledge that God took the initiative in loving us just as we are, complete with our frailties and failures?

A renewed awareness of God's love enables us to have no fear in being open to others, discerning their needs and standing alongside them, sharing material and spiritual resources.

Let's look at how Jesus did this as he is our model.

He was always the first to give: "... health to the sick, forgiveness to sinners, life to us all. He contrasted a selfish instinct to hoard with an attitude of generosity; he challenged the focus on personal needs with attention to others and the desire to possess, with a culture of giving. It does not matter whether we can give a lot or a little. What matters is how we give, how much love we put into even the smallest things we do for another person. ... Love is essential because it knows how to approach others even if all we have to offer is our availability to listen or to serve. How important ... it is to try to 'be love' beside each person. It is the most direct way to enter their hearts and raise their spirits."^{iv}

Let all that you do be done in love.

This Word teaches us to approach others with respect, without falsehood, with creativity, making room for their best aspirations, so that each person can contribute to the common good.

It helps us to value all the practical aspects of daily life: "... from household tasks, work in industrial units or on the land, duties in an office or school, to civil, religious and political responsibilities we may undertake. Everything can be transformed into attentive and caring service".^v

Let's imagine a series of images showing simple gestures inspired by the Gospel. Here are two examples.

Two parents write, "When a very distressed neighbor told us that her son was in prison, we agreed to visit him. We fasted the day before we went and hoped we would have the grace to say the right things to him. Then we paid his bail so he could leave jail."

A group of young people in Buea, southwest Cameroon, organized a collection of goods and funds to help those internally displaced by the ongoing war. They visited a man who had lost an arm while fleeing from his home. Living with this disability was extremely challenging and had a serious impact on his life. Regina said, "He told us that our visit gave him hope, joy, and confidence. He felt God's love through us." Marita added, "After this experience, I am convinced that nothing is too small if done with love... There is no need for anything else: it is love that moves the world. Try it!"

Edited by Letizia Magri and the Word of Life Team.

i This month the Word of Life we propose is the same that a group of Christians from different Churches in Germany has chosen to live throughout the year.

ii Cf. Ps. 19 [18] 105

iii Cf. Ch. 13

iv Chiara Lubich Word of Life, Oct 2006

v ibid

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- This month we allow ourselves to be enlightened by the word and experience of the Apostle Paul, as a light for our path. He announces to us, too, as he did to the Christians of Corinth, a strong message: the core of the Gospel is charity, agape, selfless love among brothers and sisters.
- It is striking that Paul exhorts us to act "being in love" as if to indicate a stable condition, an abiding in God, who is Love.
- It is this renewed awareness that enables us to open ourselves fearlessly to others, to understand their needs, and to put ourselves at their side, sharing material and spiritual resources.
- To the selfish instinct of hoarding, it opposes generosity; to the concentration on our own needs, it opposes attention to others; to the culture of possessing, that of giving.
- This Word teaches us to approach others with respect, without falsehood, with creativity, leaving room for their best aspirations, so that each one can contribute to the common good.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What is the Word of Life chosen for February and where is it taken from?
- What is the balm for the divisions that always threaten it and are a sign of hope for all humanity?
- How could we welcome one another and each person with this attitude, if not by recognizing that we are first loved by God, even in our weaknesses?
- To whom should we look at how he acted and why?
- Is it important whether we can give too much or too little?
- What does this Word of Life help us to value?
- Do you share the opinion that Marita added by listening to the experiences of this Word of Life?

Belonging to various churches – a single reality

From January 18-25, 2024, all churches in the northern hemisphere celebrated the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. In the southern hemisphere, it will take place on the *Feast of Pentecost*. This year the motto chosen is from the Gospel of Luke: “You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Locally, in each country, city, diocese, and church community, moments of prayer, conferences, round tables, and ecumenical meetings have been organized. In Rome, Pope Francis concluded the week for Prayer for Christian Unity on Thursday, Jan. 25, together with representatives of various Christian Churches with the recitation of *Vespers in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls*.

On this occasion, we offer a short video documentary on the meeting of people from the *Focolare Movement* belonging to various Churches held on October 13 and 14, 2023. It was attended by 150 people belonging to the Movement from 15 Christian Churches: Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches, Anglican Church, Lutheran and Reformed Churches, Pentecostal Church, and Catholic Church. It was a meeting among people who have been living the spirituality of unity for years and have responded to God’s call in the various vocations of the Movement. It was a moment of deep communion in an exchange of testimonies of life in their own Church and in the Movement, each with different forms and expressions bringing into play talents, culture, and knowledge, within the horizon of a constant commitment to unity at all levels.

A meeting marked by the great joy of coming together with strong bonds of unity, as in a family in which differences are valued as richness that can be known and shared to become a gift for all.

See the short video here: <https://youtu.be/Ab7gLDEeL2I>

Originally published here: <https://www.focolare.org/en/2024/01/18/belonging-to-various-churches-a-single-reality/>

Pope Francis to Finnish ecumenical group: The saints are a source of unity

To mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Francis met with groups of Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox from Finland, encouraging them to journey together as a “pilgrim Church”.

By Joseph Tulloch

Every year, Pope Francis welcomes an ecumenical delegation from Finland – comprised of Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox – to the Vatican.

This year’s visit, which took place, as always, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, involved an exchange of gifts and reflections.

The saints as source of unity

Pope Francis began by thanking the Evangelical Lutheran Bishop Åstrand “most heartily” for his reflection, “with its mention of the witness of the saints and its broad ecumenical spirit.”

He said that, upon listening to it, he had “thanked God”, since “there have been times when the veneration of saints appeared to be a source of division rather than of unity.”

The Pope noted that the Finnish delegation had mentioned “some of the great Nordic saints: Birgitta, Henrik and Olav”, suggesting that “if the millennium of Saint Olav’s death in 2030 can inspire and deepen our prayer for unity, and our journey together, this will prove a gift to the entire ecumenical movement.”

A pilgrim Church

Pope Francis also noted that he had been struck by Bishop Åstrand's reflections on "the importance of journeying", and "the pilgrim Church."

"As members of the community of the baptized," the Pope said, "we are indeed on a journey, with Jesus Christ as our common goal."

"That goal is not far distant or unattainable," he stressed, "for in his mercy our Lord has come down to meet us."

"He drew near to us in the Incarnation and made himself the Way, so that we might journey safely amid the crossroads and false paths that confront us in this world."

An ecumenism of the poor and forgotten

The Pope went on to thank the Finnish delegation for their presence, saying that "this meeting with you is a living sign in the present Week of Prayer for Christian Unity."

"Let us ensure," he added, "that this annual ecumenical encounter continues to flourish and expand."

Pope Francis stressed in particular the importance of always "welcoming our poor and forgotten brothers and sisters" during the Week of Prayer, including "those who feel abandoned by God or have strayed from the path of faith and hope."

The Pope brought his address to an end by inviting those present to recite the Lord's Prayer together, each in their own native language.



The Finnish ecumenical delegation with Pope Francis

Originally published here:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-01/pope-francis-finland-ecumenical-delegation-saints-pilgrim-church.html>

Pope to Catholic-Oriental Orthodox commission: Pray and work for communion.



Pope Francis highlights the dialogue of charity, truth, and life in his address to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

By Christopher Wells

Pope Francis on Friday received members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches at the Vatican, on the twentieth anniversary of the Commission's foundation.

With approximately 50 million members throughout the world, the Oriental Orthodox Churches represent an ancient Christian tradition that recognizes the first three Ecumenical Councils, while adhering to a “miaphysite” Christology – the subject of ongoing ecumenical discussion.

In his address on Friday, Pope Francis encouraged Commission members to continue to “pray and work tirelessly in the service of communion and in countering the famine of peace spreading throughout so many parts of the earth.”

Dialogue of charity, truth, life

The Pope went on to highlight “three inseparable ways to advance on the ecumenical journey that your Commission has encouraged over these past twenty years”: the dialogue of charity, the dialogue of truth, and the dialogue of life.

The dialogue of charity, he said, goes hand in hand with the dialogue of truth pursued by the commission, and includes the exchange of visits and letters, which have traditionally been “a sign and means of communion.”

The Pope noted, in particular, the fraternal visits of the heads of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and the Syriac Orthodox Church, over the course of the past year.

Unity in diversity

Pope Francis went on to reflect on the development of relations with the Oriental Orthodox Churches over the last two decades, highlighting “the great richness in its approach to the issue of unity in diversity.”

In particular, he noted the yearly reciprocal visits of young priests and monks for study in the various Churches, which he called “a sign of the spirit, who rejuvenates the Church in harmony, inspires paths of communion and grants wisdom to the young and prophecy to the old.”

“May this ‘dialogue of life’ continue under the banner of the Spirit!” the Pope said.

Full communion is possible

He prayed that the twentieth anniversary of the Commission might be a time of praise and gratitude to God for the progress already made, and expressed his hope that it might “renew the conviction that full communion between our Churches is not only possible but urgent and necessary ‘so that the world may believe.’”

Finally, noting that the Commission is now focusing on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Church, Pope Francis proposed that the members entrust their work to her, and invited them to pray together the ancient prayer to Mary, *Sub tuum praesidium*:

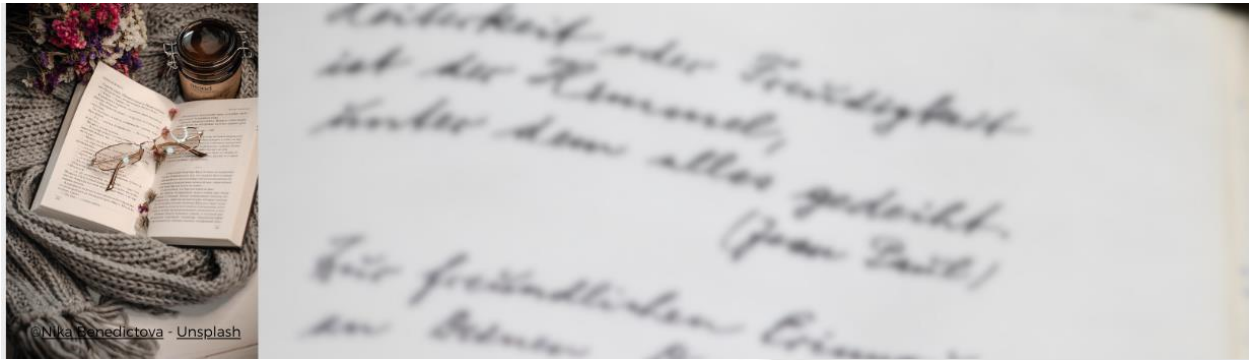
We fly to your protection, Holy Mother of God.

Scorn not our petitions in the hour of need.

O glorious and blessed Virgin,

deliver us always from every peril.

Experiences



Looking at the gestures of love performed by others sometimes generates a pull, like magnets, attracts us, softens our hearts, and awakens in us a desire to “join in,” to do the same. It is something that does not go unnoticed, capable of truly impacting many.

Poems for mother

With my mother, there had never been an easy relationship. She used to criticize my faith, calling me deluded. After leaving home, I maintained more of a relationship with my father, who wisely knew how to balance the situation. One day he called me: my mother was in the hospital for a serious illness. As I went to visit her, I thought of what could give her joy. I knew she loved the poems of Attila József, so I got one of his audiobooks. My mother was no longer herself, transformed by her sorrow. But as soon as she began to listen to those poems, her eyes became as bright as if she was dreaming. My subsequent visits thus became a discovery or rediscovery of our national poet, but it was a great joy for me to see that she had involved other sick people in reading or listening to the poems. Because of this act of charity toward them, I felt as if I was getting acquainted with another person: “You taught me that you have to love everyone,” she commented. And me? I was by her when she breathed her last serene and hopeful breath. (L.M.L. – Hungary)

Three times a day

In the usual expenditures of our family budget, we had included a sum to be made available to those in need. Only that one particular day we could not do it because there were many expenses. It was a real disappointment for us. At this point, our two little sons came with their wallets and, in front of us, poured the entire contents, all their savings, onto the table. The episode was followed up when Grandma came to visit us, and the children told her what they had done. And she, looking at us puzzled, “But how, you help others when you are also in need?” Before we could react, clearing the air was the youngest who said, “But Grandma, we eat three times a day!” With that sentence, serenity returned, and a few days later Grandma also returned with an envelope in her hand: “This is my contribution that I put together with yours... After all, I too eat three times a day!”

(L.R. – Italy)

Edited by Maria Grazia Berretta

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