

Word of Life Resources

No. 01-24

January 2024

Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

We begin this year in the light of **January's Word of Life** which is the phrase chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: "You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbor as yourself". This is Jesus' answer to a teacher of the Law who asks him, "What must I do to gain eternal life? And, to explain 'who is my neighbor', Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan until he makes the teacher understand that the neighbor is the one who helped the needy. Then, "to love", as the parable of the Good Samaritan suggests, is equivalent to becoming a "neighbor", and this brings to mind one of the priorities of the last Assembly of the Work of Mary: "to go out to become a neighbor". Following the spirit of the Assembly and adhering this year to the call of being sent out, let us begin to go out, like the Samaritan, to make ourselves a neighbor to those most needy.

To go **In Depth**, we propose a writing of Chiara, entitled: Love radiates, gives witness, which speaks of the "life-giving announcement" pointing out how giving witness is the first act of evangelization; although the witness must always precede our speaking, for us who live a communitarian spirituality, it is also essential to speak; moreover, the speaking is part of our witness; the important thing is that this speaking is based on God and for this Chiara proposes the ejaculations that are very short prayers that we direct to him as arrows. This will help us not to lose sight of the true meaning of the proclamation. To illustrate this call and sending, we propose, as an update, something about "the passion for evangelization" taken from a General Audience of the Pope in 2023.

To conclude, an **experience** from Chile on "giving one's life for one's neighbor in difficulty", and another from Colombia about a mother who, with others, committed themselves to helping her children's school with the idea that "this is their second home". With you, we set out to be 'neighbors', to follow the call and sending of the Work of Mary, "to love God... and our neighbor as ourselves". Let us welcome the Pope's call at the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Work of Mary, to "be builders of peace".

Wishing you a happy new year, we greet you with much affection:

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

You Are My Lord; I Have no Good Apart From You (Ps 16:2)

This year our Movement is looking more closely at the new evangelization and our involvement in it. We want to use these Conference Calls, too, to train and improve ourselves in carrying out this task.

In recent months, everyone has been convinced, I think, that what characterizes our evangelization and makes it fruitful is the fact that we precede the spoken word with our witness; that for us speaking must come after 'being'.

At the same time, we understood that because of the communitarian way that we follow – our very words are part of our 'being': we are truly what we must be also when we communicate.

This time we would like to emphasize the foundation, the cornerstone upon which everything must rest so as to ensure that our evangelization, which also means communicating, is authentic.

We would like to speak about the primary and indispensable commitment which guarantees that the whole building of our evangelization rests on solid ground.

Saint Theresa of Lisieux said that it is better to speak with God than to speak of God because in our conversations with others there is always the danger of bringing in self-love.

She is right, but this is not a good enough reason for us, because unlike her spirituality which emphasized the individual aspect, ours is, I repeat, a communitarian spirituality: we must also speak of God.

Nonetheless, undoubtedly, we must speak with God. We must love God above all else, with that love which is the very foundation of our Ideal life and of our evangelization, and that is expressed in prayer or in doing his will.

We must speak, therefore, with our neighbors, yes; we must use every opportunity to evangelize, yes; but above all, we must speak with God.

How should we speak?

By carrying out ever more perfectly our practices of piety, according to the various Regulations; but also by making sure, through some very brief prayers said throughout the day, that our hearts are truly aimed at him, that he is the Ideal of our life; that he reigns over us, over all our being as the true king; that he truly has the first place in our hearts; that we sincerely love him with all our strength.

I'm referring to the quick prayers that the Church recommends especially for those who are in the midst of the world and who do not have time to say long prayers. These

prayers are like arrows of love that go out from our hearts like flaming darts towards God: the so-called ejaculations which etymologically means, darts, arrows.

They are a magnificent way to direct our hearts straight towards God. Some time ago in the liturgy of the mass, we read a verse that we can use as a very beautiful ejaculation. It says: 'You are my fortune, Lord, nothing else but You.'

Let's try to repeat it during the day, especially when various attachments try to attract our hearts towards things, people, or to ourselves. Let's say: 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you' (Ps 16:2). Not that thing, not that person, not myself; 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.' This is what the Ideal has taught me, this is what I want and choose again in this moment: 'You, nothing else but You.'

Let's try to repeat it when agitation or haste would lead us to do less than the will of God in the present moment: 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you' (Ps 16:2), and so my fortune is what You want not what I want.

When curiosity or the desire for consolation urges us to know beforehand about something or someone: 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you' (Ps 16:2), not the satisfaction of my greed or pride.

Let's try to repeat it often and we will truly find the way to be that 'nothing', in the image of Jesus forsaken and Mary desolate, that 'nothing' we have often spoken about, and which attracts us so much. In this way, we will feel united to God and full of him, and we will continually lay the foundations of our true being and our necessary witness, the first act of evangelization.

Then everything in our lives will flow in the right direction. Then yes, when we speak, our words will not be just words, or worse, empty chatter, but they will be like darts that open people to love, to accept Jesus.

Try it. I have already tested it for you. I'm sure that you will tell me that these few words: 'You are my fortune, Lord, nothing else but You', were like medicine, a tonic for your souls. Saint Catherine would say that they made our hearts like a steady lamp. 'You are my fortune, Lord, nothing else but you.'

Rocca di Papa, 26 December 1991

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

“Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

On his way to Jerusalem Jesus was stopped by a doctor of the law who asked him, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus responded with a counter-question, “What is written in the Law?” He answered,

“Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself”

The doctor of the law continued by asking, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ The Master responded by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. He does not list the various types of people who may be neighbors but describes the attitude of deep compassion that should underlie all our actions. We should become ‘neighbor’ to others. So, perhaps the question to ask is, “How do we become “neighbor” to others?

Just as the Samaritan did, we can take care of our brothers and sisters who have needs that we know and not be fearful of becoming fully involved in the situations that arise all around us. Our love can show concern and bring help, support, and encouragement to those in need.

We need to see people as ‘another self’ and do to them what we would want done to us. This is the ‘golden rule’ that we find in all other religions. Gandhi explains it in another way, ‘You and I are one. I cannot hurt you without hurting myself.

“Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself”

‘If we are indifferent about the needs of our neighbor, whether they are material or spiritual, we cannot say that we love our neighbor as ourselves. We cannot say that we love them as Jesus loved them. In a community that strives to be inspired by the love that Jesus taught, there can be no place for inequality, marginalization, or neglect. ... For as long as we regard our neighbor as a stranger who is disturbing our peaceful lives and disrupting our plans, we will not be able to say that we love God with all our hearts,’ because Jesus instructs us...

“Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself”

Life is what happens in the present moment. Noticing those around us and knowing how to listen to each other can open up interesting situations and set in motion unexpected initiatives.

This is what happened to Victoria:

‘In church, I was struck by the beautiful voice of an African woman sitting next to me. I congratulated her and encouraged her to join the parish choir. This gave us an opportunity to

talk. I learned that she was a nun from Equatorial Guinea who was just passing through Madrid. She along with the others in her convent take in abandoned baby boys and girls and care for them until they become adults. These young people usually either study at university or learn a trade. They have a tailoring workshop that was well established but she said they did not have a sufficient number of sewing machines and some they had needed repair.

I offered to help her find more machines. I placed my trust in Jesus and was sure that he was listening to her needs. This urged me to love without measure.

One of my friends knew a tradesman who was happy to participate in this chain of love. He arranged to repair eight machines and even found an ironing machine for the workshop. A couple of friends offered to deliver the new machines even though it meant changing the destination of their two-day holiday by traveling nearly 600 miles. Thus, the “hope machines” arrived in Malabo after a long journey. The people in Equatorial Guinea could not believe what had happened and could only express their immense gratitude!

Prepared by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life Team

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity offers as a motif for reflection on the phrase, "You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbor as yourself," whose origin is found in the Old Testament.
- The question we must ask ourselves is: "And whose neighbor am I?"
- As the Samaritan did, we must be concerned about our brothers whose needs we know, let ourselves be dragged to the bottom of the situations that arise, without any fear, with a love that cares to help, support, and encourage everyone.
- If we remain indifferent or resigned to the needs of our neighbor, both on the level of material goods and spiritual goods, we cannot say that we love our neighbor as ourselves. We cannot say that we love him as Jesus would love him.
- Life is what happens to you in the present moment; being aware of those who pass by us, and knowing how to listen to others can open interesting horizons and unleash unsuspected initiatives.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- Jesus is intercepted by a doctor of the law on his way to Jerusalem, what does he ask him? How does Jesus answer him?
- And who is my neighbor," the doctor of the law asks.
- What is the "golden rule", which we find in all religions? How does Gandhi explain it?
- What cannot exist in a community that wants to be inspired by the love that Jesus taught us?
- Can we say that we love God with all our heart, while we see in our neighbor a stranger, the one who disturbs our tranquility or disrupts our plans?
- Can you tell us what impressed Victoria? Tell us about that experience.

Pope Francis to the Focolare Movement: ‘The world needs artisans of peace’

Pope Francis marks the 80th anniversary of the Focolare Movement expressing appreciation for its commitment to unity, love, and peace, inspired by the life of its founder, Servant of God Chiara Lubich.

By Linda Bordoni

Pope Francis on Thursday, December 7, welcomed representatives of the Focolare Movement whom he received in audience in the Vatican, and immediately recalled the moment when the movement's founder, Chiara Lubich, amidst the ordinary tasks of life during the turbulent times of World War II, made a radical act of dedication to God. On December 7, 1943, in Trento, Italy, the Pope said, Chiara's "yes" mirrored that of the Virgin Mary, and gave birth to the Focolare Movement, also known as the Work of Mary. "From an inspiration she received within a context of everyday life – while getting groceries for her family – arose a radical act of donation to God," he said, and he expressed gratitude for the work of the Focolare Movement that celebrates its 80th anniversary.

Spread the message of unity

The Holy Father upheld the Focolare Movement's significant role in spreading the message of unity for the past eight decades.

Recalling that the movement's mission is to live the Gospel through a single, simple word: unity, he said that unity also implies harmony, and he encouraged members to continue fostering mutual respect and familial warmth within their communities.

"In these eighty years, you have echoed this message among the youth, communities, families, consecrated individuals, priests, bishops, and in various social environments," he said.

Living the charism

The Pope then reminded Focolare members of Chiara Lubich's words, urging them to sow unity by bringing the Gospel message to others.

"Please sow unity by bringing the Gospel, never losing sight of the work of incarnation that God continues to want to accomplish in and around us through His Spirit," he appealed.

Artisans of fraternity and peace

Addressing the urgent need for peace in today's broken world, the Pope emphasized the ongoing relevance of the Focolare Movement's commitment to peace, and called on them to be witnesses and builders of the peace of Christ on the cross.

Never neglecting to express his concern for the persisting global conflicts and the devastating impact of war on lives he said "Today, unfortunately, the world is still torn by many conflicts and continues to need artisans of fraternity and peace among individuals and nations."

Vigilance

In his message that also resonated with the readings of the just begun season of Advent, Pope Francis invited Focolare members to remain vigilant against the trap of spiritual worldliness.

He warned against inconsistency and highlighted the importance of coherence between words and actions, noting that inconsistency is the worst witness.

"The trap of spiritual worldliness always lies in wait. It is necessary, therefore, that you also know how to react with determination, coherence, and realism," he said.

The Work of Mary

Concluding his discourse, the Pope recalled the Focolare Movement is known as "the Work of Mary", and he invoked the Blessed Virgin as a source of comfort and strength for the

Movement. Blessing all of its members, he encouraged them to continue their journey with confidence, serving as apostles of unity in the service of the Church and humanity:

"Dear brothers and sisters, as we have already recalled, you are the Work of Mary: She has accompanied you in these eighty years, and you know well that she will never stop doing so."

Originally published here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-12/pope-audience-fololare-movement-80-anniversary.html>

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: The believer's apostolic zeal. The call to the apostolate (Mt 9:9-13) General Audience January 11, 2023

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we begin a new series of catechesis, dedicated to an urgent and decisive theme for Christian life: the passion for evangelization, that is, apostolic zeal. It is a vital dimension for the Church: the community of Jesus' disciples was, in fact, born apostolic, born missionary, not proselytizing. And from the start, we had to make this distinction: being missionary, being apostolic, evangelizing, is not the same as proselytizing. They have nothing to do with one another. It concerns a vital dimension for the Church. The community of disciples of Jesus was born apostolic and missionary. The Holy Spirit molds her outwardly — a Church which goes forth, which goes out — so that she is not closed in on herself but outgoing, a contagious witness of Jesus — faith is also contagious — reaching out to radiate his light to the ends of the earth. It can happen, however, that the apostolic ardor, the desire to reach others with the good news of the Gospel, may diminish, and become tepid. Sometimes it seems to

be eclipsed; there are “closed-off” Christians, they don’t think of others. But when Christian life loses sight of the horizon of evangelization, the horizon of proclamation, it grows sick: it closes in on itself, it becomes self-referential, it becomes atrophied. Without apostolic zeal, faith withers. Mission, on the other hand, is the oxygen of Christian life: it invigorates and purifies it. Let us embark, then, on a process of rediscovering the evangelizing passion, starting with the Scriptures and the Church’s teaching, to draw apostolic zeal from its sources. Then we will approach some living sources, some witnesses who have rekindled the passion for the Gospel within the Church, so that they may help us rekindle the fire that the Holy Spirit wants to keep burning within us.

And today I would like to begin with a somewhat emblematic Gospel episode. We [just] heard it, the call of the Apostle Matthew. And he himself tells the story in his Gospel, which we have heard (cf. 9:9-13).

It all begins with Jesus, who, the text says, “saw a man”. Few people saw Matthew as he was: they knew him as the one who was “sitting at the tax office” (v. 9). He was, in fact, a tax collector: that is, someone who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman empire that occupied Palestine. In other words, he was a collaborator, a traitor to the people. We can imagine the contempt the people felt for him: he was a “publican”, as they were called. But in the eyes of Jesus, Matthew is a man, with both his miseries and his greatness. Be aware of this: Jesus does not stop at the adjective — Jesus always seeks out the noun. “This person is a sinner, he’s that kind of person...” these are adjectives: Jesus goes to the person, to the heart, “This is a person, this is a man, this is a woman”. Jesus goes to the essence, the noun, never the adjective. He leaves aside the adjectives. And while there is distance between Matthew and his people — because they see the adjective, “publican” — Jesus draws near to him, because every person is loved by God. “Even this wretch”? Yes, even this wretch. Indeed, the Gospel says he came for this very wretch: “I have come for sinners, not for the righteous”. This gaze of Jesus that sees the other, whoever he may be as the recipient of love, is really beautiful and it is the beginning of evangelizing passion. Everything starts from this gaze, which we learn from Jesus.

We can ask ourselves: how do we look upon others? How often do we see their faults and not their needs; how often do we label people according to what they do or what they think? Even as Christians we say to ourselves: is he one of us or not? This is not the gaze of Jesus: He always looks at each person with mercy and indeed with predilection. And Christians are called to do as Christ did, looking, like him, especially at the so-called “distant ones”. Indeed, Matthew’s account of the call ends with Jesus saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (v. 13). And if any one of us considers themselves righteous, Jesus is far away. He draws near to our limitations, to our miseries, in order to heal us.

It all starts, then, with the gaze of Jesus. “He saw a man”, Matthew. This is followed — second step — by a movement. First the gaze: Jesus saw. Then the second step, movement. Matthew was sitting at the tax office; Jesus said to him: “Follow me”. And “he rose and followed him” (v. 9). We note that the text emphasizes that “he rose”. Why is this detail so important? Because in those days he who was seated had authority over the others who stood before him to listen to him or, as in that case, to pay taxes. He who sat, in short, had power. The first thing Jesus does is to detach Matthew from power: from sitting to receive others, He sets him in motion towards others, not receiving, no: he goes out to others. He makes him leave a position of supremacy to put him on an equal footing with his brothers and sisters and open to him the horizons of service. This is what he does, and this is fundamental for Christians. Do we, disciples of Jesus, we, Church, sit around waiting for people to come, or do we know how to get up, to set out with others, to seek others? Saying, “But let them come to me, I am here, let them come”, is a non-Christian position. No, you go to seek them out, you take the first step.

A look — Jesus saw; a movement — “he rose”; and third, a destination. After getting up and following Jesus, where will Matthew go? We might imagine that having changed the man’s life, the Master would lead him to new encounters, and new spiritual experiences. No, or at least not immediately. First, Jesus goes to his home; there Matthew prepares “a great feast” for him, in which “a large crowd of tax collectors” — that is, people like him — takes part (cf. Lk 5:20). Matthew returns to his

environment, but he returns there changed and with Jesus. His apostolic zeal does not begin in a new, pure place, an ideal place, far away, but instead, he begins there where he lives, with the people he knows. Here is the message for us: we do not have to wait until we are perfect and have come a long way following Jesus to bear witness to him, no. Our proclamation begins today and there where we live. It does not begin by trying to convince others, but by bearing witness every day to the beauty of the Love that has looked upon us and lifted us up. And it is this beauty, communicating this beauty, that will convince people — not communicating ourselves but the Lord himself. We are the ones who proclaim the Lord. We do not proclaim ourselves, we do not proclaim a political party, or an ideology. No: we proclaim Jesus. We need to put Jesus in contact with the people, without convincing them but allowing the Lord to do the convincing. For as Pope Benedict taught us, “The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by ‘attraction’” (Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida, 13 May 2007). Do not forget this: when you see Christians proselytizing, making a list of people to come... these are not Christians; they are pagans disguised as Christians, but the heart is pagan. The Church grows not by proselytism, it grows by attraction.

I remember once, in a hospital in Buenos Aires, the women religious who worked there left because they were too few, and they couldn't run the hospital. And a community of sisters from Korea came. And they arrived, let's say on a Monday for example (I don't remember the day). They took possession of the sisters' house in the hospital and on Tuesday they came down to visit the sick in the hospital, but they didn't speak a word of Spanish. They only spoke Korean and the patients were happy, because they commented: “Well done! These nuns, bravo, bravo!” “But what did the sister say to you?” “Nothing, but with her gaze she spoke to me, they communicated Jesus”. Not to communicate ourselves but to communicate Jesus, with a gaze, with gestures. This is attraction, the opposite of proselytism.

This attractive witness, this joyful witness is the goal to which Jesus leads us with his loving gaze and with the outgoing movement that his Spirit raises up in our hearts.

And we can consider whether our gaze resembles that of Jesus, to attract the people, to bring them closer to the Church. Let us think about that.

Read full document here:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2023/documents/20230111-udienza-generale.html>

Experiences

To give our life for our neighbor in need

For 20 years I have had my hair cut with the same hairdresser (Paco), in downtown Santiago de Chile. The only time I had available to get a haircut this time was at 1:30 pm and that day I had a virtual meeting, with the camera on, at 2:30 pm. I felt it was important to get a haircut to be neater for my presentation to the bank's management. The timing was just right for me to go at lunchtime and come back just in time for the meeting. It was all calculated.

I arrived at the place punctually, and I saw Paco who, through the window, very distressed, was making gestures to me. Almost crying, he said to me: "Rodrigo, a pipe broke, I can't attend to you". The place was all wet, the furniture was a mess, he was trying to clean up the mess and I was looking at the clock for my meeting. I suggested to Paco to go to the hardware store right away to buy the spare part, while I stayed to take care of the place. It was already 1:40 when I started to clean the floor until it was quite dry.

Paco arrived with the spare part, and we started to repair the plumbing. It didn't matter what time it was; I gave everything to the Eternal Father and his Will.

It was almost 2:00 p.m. when Paco asked me to sit down to get my hair cut. I was very nervous because it seemed to me that I would not make it to the meeting, but I let myself be carried by that feeling that comes from inside when you feel that you are not alone. I felt immersed in the impulse to give my life for my neighbor, in this case for Paco with his flooded place, keeping myself in the Will of God expressed by the circumstances. It was 2:15 pm. I said goodbye and ran off to take an Uber to get to the meeting on time. At the door, my wife was waiting for me with a bottle of water, as if it was a marathon. I sat down at the computer at 14:31.

I was the second to present and the meeting was a success because I was able to present the points of the area I was responsible for. After the meeting, in the silence of the break, I thought: "What a beautiful day! You plan something and God changes it to remind you that there are more important things than a meeting... giving your life for your neighbor in need".

School, our children's second home

Observing the surroundings in my community, especially the school where my children study, I have seen that unfortunately, it is in bad condition, so I felt a strong call of commitment and love for my community, asking myself these questions: where are the values? is this my community? what sense of belonging do I have with it? I immediately called a meeting to discuss this with all the mothers; once gathered, we became aware that the school is the second home of our children and that part of feeling good in our community is to work for it. I quickly made them the proposal to collaborate by cleaning the classrooms, the desks, and the garden. Moved by love, the mothers started cleaning the surrounding area, and we took the initiative to plant vegetables.

For me this was a call to work in the community and to live the word of life: "Set your minds on heavenly things and not on earthly things" (Col 3:2), that is, putting into practice those values that Jesus brought to earth and by which his followers are distinguished.

By doing this for my community I understood the importance of all of us, the parents, also being part of the school; our children observe us and feel encouraged seeing us working in the school and that is what motivates us to continue working together.

By Gloria Chilito Penagos - Colombia

Source: AÑO XXXVIII No. 45 - MAY 2023 - WWW.CIUDADNUEVA.CO