

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,

In these days, after having made the journey of Lent that culminated with the Easter Triduum and the joy of the Resurrection, the most frequent greeting, especially in the Church environment, is "**Happy Easter!**". It should be emphasized that the primary motif of this greeting is the proclamation of the Good News: "Christ is risen!". This month's Word of Life refers to this announcement, as it states:

"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all." (Acts 4:33). This new Word of Life - comments Patrizia Mazzola - invites us to be witnesses of this Resurrection, keeping mutual love burning among us.

If "**called and sent**" is the motto of the Work of Mary for this year, we, who welcomed the proclamation of the Risen Jesus, can also go forth to proclaim with hope the joy of the Risen One in our midst.

In what way? In the **In-depth** section, Chiara starts from the question: "**Am I evangelizing?**" and she does this by noting the Church's need for a new evangelization. Evoking the early days of the Movement, she recalls that the rule is none other than the Gospel: the lived Gospel. Our being sent, therefore, is to proclaim it, to spread it, and we do this - she says - by living the Ideal, establishing the presence of Jesus among us, bringing this way of living to the various structures of the Church and society, but also by speaking, not to convince but, above all, to ensure that, little by little, the Gospel becomes the living norm of existence.

Jesus is the model of proclamation - says the Pope in the **News** section; he is, because he is the Word, the Word; "he is always in relationship, always going out"; "he does not only have words of life"; his life is the Word; "he gives his life for the sheep"; "he has always gone to meet the marginalized, the sinners". And he concludes by saying: "We must not be shepherds of ourselves, but shepherds of all", because "God suffers for those who leave and, as he weeps for them, he loves them even more".

In the **Experiences** section, we find examples of this being lived concretely - by a couple facing a difficult pregnancy, by a man who gave a stranger all that he had, by

a group of families who welcomed young immigrants and by a woman who encountered an old classmate living as a beggar.

May the greeting of Happy Easter, expressed not only in words but with the experiences of this month's Word of Life, be the best way to live the Pope's sending us out to be builders of peace in our environments and our communities, just like those to whom the apostles announced the Resurrection.

Warmest greetings to each one of you,
The Word of Life Workbook Team

Ask Yourself with each action: Am I Evangelizing?

For some years now, an insistent call has been launched in the Roman Catholic Church and in all the Christian Churches, a call that expresses an absolute duty: it urges us to evangelize or better, to re-evangelize.

This call comes from the bitter observation that Europe, and not Europe alone, has been invaded by secularization, by materialism. The Gospel principles are less and less appreciated or followed. Religious life is often ignored, abandoned, and also Christ today, as one religious, a poet, wrote 'is no longer bought (by many hearts) not even for thirty pieces of silver.'

It really looks as if everything has to start again from square one.

How do we, members of the Focolare Movement, feel in the face of this huge problem? How can we be genuine children of the Church today when it is almost begging us all to set out in the direction of a new evangelization? Should we change something? Should we add something? Should we take on new responsibilities? In order to answer this question properly, we have to look at our own history and see what God asked of us, precisely in this century which is so de-Christianized. Remember the early days.

God did not allow us to have anything in our hands except the little book of the Gospels.

Through a special grace of the Holy Spirit, we understood some basic words in that book in a way that was completely new.

And we were so attracted by what was written in it that we thought that the Rule of the Movement, which was about to be born, should not be anything but the Gospel. Besides, in the Gospel we found everything.

The Old Testament flows into it; in it was contained the law of life, the very law of the life of the Trinity that Jesus had shared with humanity; in the Gospel we could again see emerging from the heart of Christ the Church, its hierarchy and, illuminated by the promise of the Spirit to the apostles, the full meaning of its teaching authority; and the other books of the New Testament were applications, hence explanations and amplifications, of the Gospel.

So, the Movement had made a real find. To live the Gospel, to spread the Gospel was its vocation.

But let's think about this a little. Is it not genuine evangelization, indeed a new evangelization in more than one sense of the term?

In-depth

Then, as we know, it was from the Gospel that a few points emerged which gave birth to our Gospel spirituality.

But they are to be understood, interpreted in the context of the whole Gospel and of all that is connected to the Gospel. It would be an impoverishing reduction, it would be a grave error, to see them in any other way.

Yes, because the Gospel is like a big net. We lift it with our hands by putting ourselves into twelve of its links (the points of our spirituality) – but in this way we lift the whole net.

Therefore, we can say that our spirituality undoubtedly rests on the twelve points underlined for us by the Spirit in the Gospel, but also that our spirituality is the Gospel.

This all happened, I think, so that, when the Church would feel the urgency of a re-evangelization and undertake it in many ways, the Holy Spirit would raise up forces (and among them ourselves) that could carry it out.

Dearest, so what answer ought we give to the question: what should we do? How should we be involved in this new evangelization?

We must answer by being more aware of what God has given us and by living it with greater fullness.

God did not ask us primarily to build hospitals for lepers or orphanages, schools or other good works (we have these too, but they come later).

God put the Gospel into our hands, gave us a new light on the Gospel, a way of seeing and understanding the Gospel suited precisely to these times. Our first task is to give this Gospel to others, to announce it and spread it.

'Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!' (1 Cor 9:16) said St Paul because he was an apostle.

'Woe to us if we do not evangelize', should be repeated by us, little apostles. And how? By life and by word.

Certainly, we do not evangelize only when we distribute the Word of Life. We do it always, when we live our Ideal.

Do we overcome suffering, by going (as we say) 'beyond the wound'? We are evangelizing: our brothers and sisters are not insensitive to the risen one who lives in us.

Do we establish the presence of Jesus among us so that unity is achieved? We are evangelizing: in fact the world believes.

Do we speak, write, converse, take part actively in Mariapolis, Congresses, Day Meetings, schools, gatherings, groups ... ? Do we cultivate our clusters? We are evangelizing.

Do we work with our spirit in the structures of the Church? We are evangelizing.

In-depth

And therefore, we have only to go ahead with our Ideal life.

Perhaps we should emphasize speaking, after having lived of course, but speaking. In the early days we spoke more. Faith reaches people because they hear God's Word. Speaking. And if it is difficult to speak (because there are those who are, as it were, allergic to movements for example), let's speak about its principles only: how to love, how to face suffering, how to view the Church, the Pope, how we should be honest, pure, detached ...

Besides, today, everybody speaks: there is more freedom than before; there is respect for other peoples' ideas, because there is tolerance. Let's take advantage of this and speak too.

Now that we see in Europe, for instance, the amazing events where barriers collapse and many people from Eastern Europe, often lacking religious notions, are coming to the West, it is doubly urgent that we evangelist. We must not let be that they only find consumerism and our other evils. They must meet the living Church, true Christians.

There is therefore much, very, very much to be done.

So, to conclude, in the next fortnight let's try to ask ourselves with each action we do, are we evangelizing? And speak a little more.

Chiara Lubich, Rocca di Papa, 23 November 1989

Published in: Lubich, Chiara. "1989." *Conference Calls*, New City, UK, 2022, pp. 344–347.

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all. (Acts 4:33)

This word, which comes during the Easter season, invites everyone who has received the message of the Gospel to respond freely and to witness to the event that has marked history: it invites us to witness to Jesus' resurrection!

To fully understand the meaning of this verse taken from the Acts of the Apostles, it is helpful to quote the sentence that precedes it: "The believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." i

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.

The text describes the first Christian community filled with the power of the Spirit and characterized by a sense of fellowship that urges each member to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to everyone, namely that Christ is risen.

These are the same people who before Pentecost were alarmed and frightened by the events that had taken place but had now come out into the open and were ready to bear witness even to the point of martyrdom. This was thanks to the power of the Spirit that swept away fear and apprehension.

They were one heart and one soul; they practiced mutual love to the point of sharing their possessions and this way of life was involving an always greater number of people. Women and men had followed Jesus and heard his words: they had lived alongside him loving and serving the sick and those regarded as the least in society. They had seen Jesus' wondrous deeds with their own eyes and their lives had changed because they had been called to live according to his new law. They had been the first witnesses of God's living presence among men and women.

But what does it mean for followers of Jesus to be witnesses today?

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.

The most effective way to bear witness to the Risen One is to show that he is alive and lives among us. "If we live his Word, [...] keeping love for our neighbor alive in our hearts, if we strive in a special way to always keep mutual love at the basis of our relationships, then the Risen One will live in and among us. He will radiate his light and grace around us, transforming our surroundings and producing incalculable fruits. Through his Spirit, he will guide our steps and actions and create opportunities for us to share his life with people who are in need of him."ⁱⁱ

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.

Margaret Karramⁱⁱⁱ writes :”Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation”^{iv} is the extraordinary task the apostles received 2,000 years ago directly from Jesus and that changed the course of history. Today Jesus addresses the same invitation to us so that we can bring him into the world. He offers us the opportunity to do so using all the creativity, talents and freedom he himself has given us.”^v

It is a proclamation “that does not end with his death, on the contrary! It takes on new strength after the Resurrection and Pentecost, where the disciples became courageous witnesses of the Gospel. And their mandate then comes down to us today. Through me, through each of us, God wants to continue to tell his story of love to those with whom we share long or short stretches of our life.”^{vi}

Edited by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life team

ⁱ Acts 4:32

ⁱⁱ C. Lubich, Word of Life, Jan 1986

ⁱⁱⁱ President of Focolare Movement

^{iv} Mk. 16:15

^v Margaret Karram, *Called & Sent* 15 Sept 2023

^{vi} Ibid

Points to reflect on and Points for Dialogue

- This word, which falls at Easter time, invites us to be witnesses too, with the full freedom of those who have received the Gospel message, of the event that has marked history: Jesus is risen!
- The text presents the Christian community animated by the powerful force of the Spirit, characterized by communion, which impels it to proclaim to all the Gospel, the good news, that is, that Christ is risen.
- They were of one heart and one soul, practicing mutual love to the point of putting their goods in common: this was the reality that was involving more and more people.
- Women and men who followed Jesus had listened to his words, they had lived with him, serving and loving the least, the sick; they had seen with their eyes the prodigious deeds worked by Jesus, and their lives had changed because, called to live a new law, they had been the first witnesses of the living presence of God in the midst of men.
- It will be He who will guide our steps and our activities with His Spirit; who will arrange the circumstances and provide us with the occasions to bring His life to the people who need Him.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- To fully understand the meaning of this verse from the Acts of the Apostles, will you be able to quote the phrase that precedes it?
- For us, followers of Jesus today, what does it mean to bear witness?
- Thanks to what, and what did he take away, from those same people who before Pentecost were frightened and distressed at the latest events that had happened and who go out in the open, ready to bear witness even to the point of martyrdom?
- To what does Margaret Karram motivate us in relation to this word of life?
- After Margaret's invitation, do you want to become a courageous witness of the Gospel, falling in love, incarnating and making the Gospel your own, so that God may continue to tell his story of love to those with whom we share short or long stretches of life? Let us know how your heart is feeling.

Catechesis. The passion for evangelization: The apostolic zeal of the believer. 2. *Jesus, model of evangelization*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last Wednesday we began a series of catechesis on the passion of evangelization, that is, on the apostolic zeal that should enliven the Church and every Christian. Today, let us look at the unsurpassable model of proclaiming: Jesus. The Christmas Day Gospel defined him as the “Word of God” (cf. Jn 1:1). The fact that he is the Logos, that is, the Word, highlights an essential aspect of Jesus: He is always in relation, outgoing, never isolated, always in relation, outgoing. The word, in fact, exists to be transmitted, communicated. So it is with Jesus, the Eternal Word of the Father, reaching out to us, communicated to us. Christ not only has words of life, but makes his life a Word, a message: that is, he lives always turned toward the Father and toward us. Always looking at his Father who sent him and looking at us to whom he was sent.

Indeed, if we look at his days, described in the Gospels, we see that intimacy with the Father — prayer — occupies first place. This is why Jesus gets up early, when it is still dark, and goes into deserted areas to pray (cf. Mk 1:35; Lk 4:42), to speak with the Father. He makes all of his decisions and most important choices after having prayed (cf. Lk 6:12; 9:18). It is precisely within this relationship, in the prayer which connects him to the Father in the Spirit, that Jesus discovers the meaning of his being human, of his existence in the world, because he is on a mission for us, sent by the Father to us.

It is thus interesting to note the first public act that he accomplishes after the years of his hidden life in Nazareth. Jesus does not work a great wonder, he does not send an impactful message, but he mingles with the people who were going to be baptized by John. In this way, he offers us the key by which he acts in the world: spending himself for sinners, putting himself in solidarity with us without distance, in a total sharing of life. In fact, speaking about his mission, he will say that he did not come “to be served but to serve, and to give his life” (Mk 10:45). Every day after praying, Jesus dedicates his entire day to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and dedicates it to people, above all to the poorest and weakest, to sinners and to the sick (cf. Mk 1:32-39). That is, Jesus is in contact with the Father in prayer and then he is in contact with all the people through his mission, through catechesis, to teach the path of the Kingdom of God.

Now, should we want to represent his style of life with an image, it would not be difficult for us to find it: Jesus himself offers it to us. We have heard him, speaking of himself as the Good Shepherd, the one who, he says, “lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). This is Jesus. In reality, being a shepherd was not just a job that required time and a lot of dedication; it was a true and proper way of life: 24 hours a day, living with the flock, accompanying it to pasture, sleeping among the sheep, taking care of those who were weakest. In other words, Jesus does not do something for us, but he gives everything. He gives his life for us. He has a pastoral

heart (cf. Ez 34:15). He is a shepherd for all of us.

Indeed, to sum up the action of the Church in one word, precisely the term “pastoral” is often used. And to evaluate our pastoral work we need to confront ourselves with the model, confront ourselves with Jesus, Jesus the Good Shepherd. Above all, we can ask ourselves: do we imitate him, drinking from the wells of prayer so that our heart might be in harmony with his? Intimacy with him is, as a beautiful volume by Abbot Chautard suggested, the soul of every apostolate. Jesus himself clearly said it to his disciples: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). If we stay with Jesus, we discover that his pastoral heart always beats for the person who is confused, lost, far away. And ours? How many times do we express our attitude toward people who are a bit difficult or with whom we have a bit of difficulty: “But it’s their problem, let them work it out...”. But Jesus never said this, never. Instead, he always went to meet all the marginalized, the sinners. He was accused of this — of being with sinners — because he brought God’s salvation precisely to them.

We have heard the parable of the lost sheep, found in chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke (cf. vv. 4-7). Jesus also speaks about the lost coin and about the prodigal son. If we want to train our apostolic zeal, we should always have chapter 15 of Luke before our eyes. Read it often. There we can understand what apostolic zeal is. There we discover that God does not remain contemplating the sheep pen, nor does he threaten them so they won’t leave. Rather, if one leaves and gets lost, he does not abandon it but goes in search of it. He does not say, “It left. That’s its fault. That’s its business!” His pastoral heart reacts in another way: the pastoral heart suffers and the pastoral heart takes risks. It suffers: yes, God suffers for those who leave and, while he mourns over them, he loves them even more. The Lord suffers when we distance ourselves from his heart. He suffers for all who do not know the beauty of his love and the warmth of his embrace. But, in response to this suffering, he does not withdraw; rather, he takes a risk. He leaves the 99 sheep who are safe and ventures out for the lost one, thus doing something both risky and unreasonable, but consonant with his pastoral heart which misses the one who left. The longing for those who have left is constant in Jesus. And when we hear that someone has left the Church, what do we want to say? “Let them work it out”. No. Jesus teaches us nostalgia for those who have left. Jesus does not feel anger or resentment but pure longing for us. Jesus feels nostalgic for us and this is God’s zeal.

And I wonder, do we have similar sentiments? Perhaps we see those who have left the flock as adversaries or enemies. “And this person?” “No, they’ve gone to the other side, they’ve lost the faith, they’re going to hell...”, and we are serene. When we meet them at school, at work, on the streets of the city, why don’t we think instead that we have a beautiful opportunity to witness to them the joy of a Father who loves them and has never forgotten them? Not to proselytize, no! But that the Word of the Father might reach them so we can walk together. To evangelize is not to proselytize. To proselytize is something pagan; it is neither religious nor evangelical. There is a good word for those who have left the flock and we have the honor and the burden of being the ones to speak that word. Because the Word, Jesus, asks this of us: to always draw near to everyone, with an open heart, because he is like that. Perhaps we have been following and loving Jesus for some time and have never wondered if we share his feelings, if we suffer and we take risks in harmony with Jesus’s heart, with this pastoral heart, close to Jesus’s pastoral heart! This is not about proselytism, as I said, so that others become “one of us”. No, this is not Christian. It is about loving so that they might be happy children of

News

God. In prayer, let us ask for the grace of a pastoral heart, an open heart that draws near to everyone, so as to bear the Lord's message as well as to feel Christ's longing for each of them. For without this love that suffers and takes risks, our life does not work. If we Christians do not have this love that suffers and takes risks, we risk pasturing only ourselves. Shepherds who are shepherds of themselves, instead of being shepherds of the flock, are people who comb "exquisite" sheep. We do not need to be shepherds of ourselves, but shepherds for everyone.

POPE FRANCIS, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Paul VI Audience Hall, Wednesday, 18 January 2023

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2023/documents/20230118-udienza-generale.html>

The Gospel in action: take up your cross and follow Him

1. The unexpected

We were expecting our first child. Immediately after this news came an unexpected discovery: I had a small nodule in my breast. The tests showed that it was cancer. For me and for my husband, who is a physician, it was a terrible blow. Three days after the visit with a specialist, I had an operation. In his opinion, keeping the baby was an aggravating factor: we should have immediately proceeded with a therapeutic abortion in order to start chemotherapy. We didn't want to give up. Trusting in God, we consulted other doctors, seeking an alternative solution. In the end we decided to have a Cesarean section in the seventh month of pregnancy, when the baby would be perfectly able to survive. Only afterwards would I start the chemotherapy and radiation. Since then, 8 years have passed and we are expecting our third child.

M. D. – France

2. The stranger

One day I was in the car with a man who had asked me for a ride. It was noon, and I asked him where he was going to have lunch. He answered, "I haven't got a penny, and I have no idea how I'm going to eat." I was overcome with suspicions and indifference. But I pushed these thoughts away, saying to Jesus in my heart: "It doesn't matter who he is, what I do for him, I do for you." I fished in my pocket and gave him all I had, adding, so as not to humiliate him, "Pay me back whenever you can." A few days later, I received an envelope from a

Experiences

client with the exact amount that I had given that stranger inside. For me, this situation was the confirmation that the Gospel is true.

A. G. – Italy

3. A family party

We had an idea, with several other families that are friends of ours, to organize a party for the Senegalese in our city. We were all committed to making these young immigrants feel the warmth of the family. Afterwards, one of them commented: “Everything went beyond our expectations. No one made us feel different and because of this, we felt at home. We have the same God who makes us brothers and sisters.” The party had finished, but the friendship continues.

G. L. – Italy

4. We have a Father

By chance, we met again after many years. I hadn't seen her since my high school years. Although she had a degree in mathematics, after a very sad sequence of events she now found herself in my city without even a penny, living the life of a beggar. She was desperate, and I listened to her story. At that moment, I had nothing to give her, but I promised to help her: I told her she must be certain of this, because, “We have a Father in heaven.” We made plans to meet again the next day. In the meantime, with the help of some others, I found a temporary accommodation for her and gathered some money: at least enough to live on, to be able to eat and to bathe. After two days she contacted me again, and returning the money, she explained that she had been offered a job in a place that also provided room and board. She added, “I have to thank you, not only for the money, but because

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that day you gave me back what I needed most: the hope and the certainty that I have a Father who cares for me.”

Franca – Italy

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