

The Health 2020 (green) Newsletter

Version: 20 August 2020

The Focolare Movement's spirituality, inspired by the Gospel, generates a way of life that responds to widespread questions on the meaning of life and on authenticity. Reciprocal love has revealed a "paradigm of unity", a "practical way" for spiritual and social renewal.

The Focolare Movement is an international faith-based organisation working for unity and dialogue between people of different faiths and all people of goodwill. One of its key points, 'to be first to love' motivates everyone to reach out to others and try to be a supportive community.

The area of **Health in the New Humanity Branch** of the Focolare Movement involves everything connected with our life, such as food, health, rest, environment, recreation, and sport. It also concerns the whole spectrum of human life, including birth, illness, suffering and death.

New Humanity includes people of all faiths and with no faith, as well as all social and racial or cultural backgrounds. We try to encourage reciprocity in work, projects, discussions, and ideas with others through God's love, which brings unity. This way of offering our ideas and activities renews relationships, environments, and structures, even influencing politicians and legislators.

“God is Life”

When the soul, which has abandoned itself to God, has for some time made the law of 'believing in love' (1 John 4:16) its own, God shows himself. With newly opened eyes the soul sees that from every trial it gathers new fruits, every fight is followed by victory, every tear flowers in a smile that is new, always new, because God is Life, who allows torture, evil, for a greater good.

The soul understands that the life of Jesus does not culminate in the 'via crucis' and in death, but in the resurrection and the ascension to heaven.

Then the human way of seeing things fades and becomes meaningless, and bitterness no longer poisons the brief joys of this earthly life. For the soul that proverb which is so full of melancholy, '*there is no rose without a thorn*', means nothing. But because of the wave of the revolution of love into which God has drawn the soul, the exact opposite is true: '*There is no thorn without a rose*'.

Meditations by Chiara Lubich, page 77-78

'Via Crucis' definition - Any extremely arduous or painful experience requiring strength or courage to endure.

Shared Experiences



Our life during this time of COVID-19

The Focolare group from Futuna Island

The month of March knowing that there was an outbreak of Corona Virus all over the world, our three Kings of Wallis and Futuna and our great chiefs had a meeting, and they agreed, to walk together with the whole world, especially in this moment of COVID-19. No more parties, dances, or big meals (katoaga - lots of big pigs with lots of food - it is like an offering to God) especially on the 28 of April in Futuna Island. It is a big Feast for Saint Peter Chanel. Usually we receive lots of pilgrimages from other Islands to celebrate together our patron Saint Peter Chanel. We begin with a great Mass followed by

- dances
- kava
- meals
- katoaga.

In mid-March, after Ash Wednesday, every Friday in the evening around 5:00 or 5:30 pm, in each village we do the Way of the Cross, until Friday 3 March 2020.

On Good Friday we did the Way of the Cross together in the district of Alo, starting with a Mass from another village and then we did the procession to our Cathedral and ended with a prayer.

For the feast of our Patron, Saint of Oceania St. Peter Chanel, the chiefs decided that we do only the Mass. It is the first time we are only going to Mass, but there are no dances, no kava, big meal and katoaga afterwards. It was a bit strange, but we were happy to offer all this for those around the world who have COVID- 19. So, the head of the village where the basilica of St. Peter Chanel is, together with the people, decided that there will be no more partying until the end of the year. Our help, our contribution is to cancel all feasts, we offer our time and pray for the others.

The bishop and the priest gave us a “novena” a prayer that we recite together after our prayers every night for the countries that are in need especially the Coronas Virus.

Afterwards, the month of May, the month dedicated to Mary, we made pilgrimages with the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus.



Our diocese is composed of seven villages, so we start from another village at the end. All the people of the district go to accompany the village that started the procession. When they arrive in this village, they do vigils, mime, songs, meditations. We offer for the whole world especially those touched the COVID-19. We are very happy, because we do not have COVID-19 yet, and we keep praying for the whole world.

One night at the Tauasu, there was an elderly man who told one of the members of the Focolare: You know because of the Focolare, the other villages do mimes, cheerful games, meditation, sharing. It is the Focolare who gave this way of life, you are the ones who started, your Movement.

Focolare, you started all this and now they are imitating and preparing programs as well. We are very happy because we have made a big gesture, a gigantic gesture that everybody in our island imitates.

We want to share with you this little gesture we offer for COVID-19 around the world. All our unity for everything.



Ann-Marie Diggins

Melbourne

I am a General Practitioner (GP) in Melbourne, working in a community health centre. I have been living the Focolare spirituality of unity for some time and I find it helpful in the care of my patients. In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have heightened anxiety and depression.

I want to share about one patient, who has a pre-existing anxiety disorder prior to the COVID-19 lockdowns. Since the pandemic started, her anxiety has got much worse. She barely leaves her home, no longer going for any walks she used to, and she struggles to do her shopping with mask and gloves.

She lives about 10-15-minute drive from the community health centre and requested that I see her at her home for consultations. These days very few GPs see patients in their homes due to the costs and low Medicare rebates. After a bit of a struggle within myself to overcome my reluctance and for her sake, I agreed to see her at home.

I allowed 1 hour, which includes the drive there and back and the consultation time itself using full PPE- gown, gloves, face mask and face shield. Each time I visit, which is fortnightly, I have been doing a test for COVID-19 (all negative so far), and I address her other physical and psychological issues. It takes time to explain her physical symptoms explicitly and some counselling. This has helped her cope better and manage her anxiety. The patient is much calmer when I leave her after the consultation in her home.

Every Neighbour, a Jesus to Love

During the COVID-19 lockdown in Australia, a Filipino family's deep faith in God leads them to help their needy compatriots and experience God's boundless generosity.



**Jun and Glenda Villanueva
& family, Sydney**

During this trying time of pandemic, the lives of millions of people have been affected. Our family was no exception. My wife, Glenda, lost one of her jobs as a nurse in an aged care facility. One of our daughters lost her casual work, and another daughter lost a significant number of work hours. I had to stay home after undergoing a major surgical procedure. While we suffered from this pandemic, we knew that there were many other people who were suffering more than we. We came across a social media group which aims to give assistance to foreign students, affected by the COVID-19 lockdown, particularly Filipino students stranded in Australia... who have either lost jobs and were unable to get government support... don't have family here or ... who needed assistance of every kind.

Glenda said that she had been in the same situation before and knew how hard it was to feel helpless. So, we decided to extend some help to these students. We know God has blessed us. So, we can be a blessing to others too. Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of My brothers, you do it to Me. When I was hungry, you gave Me to eat, when I was thirsty, you gave Me to drink. I was naked and you clothed Me."

We found this time as an opportunity to love Jesus in others. Thus, we signed up to extend assistance to 2 groups of Filipino students (a group of 4 and a group of 6): to supply them with bags of groceries, clothes, and other things they needed... We started opening our closets and sort out some winter clothes which we could share, because winter was approaching. We went shopping for groceries like food and toiletries. Giving out groceries and meeting up with them was an experience of meeting Jesus in them. We gave them not only material things but supported them by simply listening to their experiences... their difficulties... and giving them assurances and encouragements. They were incredibly grateful and happy, but we were happier because we were able to love and help Jesus in them concretely.

God is never outdone in generosity. Recently, Glenda was offered a full-time permanent job in another aged care facility where she was working part-time... A daughter was granted a Jobkeeper support. I recovered pretty well from my surgery and now I am back to work. My other daughter is still waiting for a possible support from a company, and just this week, we received a call from the Philippines that a family wanted to rent our house there. This was quite unexpected because our house was vacant and had not been rented since last year. This is our experience of the "hundredfold" that Jesus promises in the Gospel to those who love and follow Him. Everything has been totally beyond our expectation!

From New City, Philippine Edition, 30 July 2020



An Experience of Pain

Joe O'Brien

Perth, Western Australia

Over many years I have suffered chest pain, to the point I cannot remember not having it for an extended period. Last year I had had enough, so I wanted to find out what it was, after a visit to the Emergency Department (ED) at the hospital. I saw a Cardiologist and had a myocardial perfusion scan, which noted some minor plaque buildup but nothing to worry about.

This year the stress at work in pastoral care at the prisons has been incredible. Staff are stressed, residents are stressed, especially when no visitors were allowed. If COVID-19 virus got into the place it would be a mess. I was a real grump.

I got bad chest pain a month or so ago and attended ED. They said that due to the blood results being OK and the results of the scan last year, I should be OK. I then saw my Cardiologist a few days later and he said something similar but wanted to do an angiogram to show the pain specialist that he was referring me to, that it was not the heart. The angiogram became an angioplasty with a stent in my LAD, due to an almost totally blocked artery. The medical registrar did not believe me when I said I had not had a heart attack.

A month on and I am starting to feel better and have more energy, even though the pain has not gone completely. What strikes me most is the support I have had from my colleagues, my wife, and kids and those around me, it is truly humbling. I still do not know what is causing some of the pain. However, in accepting I do not know and where I am at, I have found peace. Pain I still get, but it is manageable and maybe I will never know why. Those around me who know, are asking regularly how I am feeling. Just feeling cared for and loved makes this even more bearable.

Books and Magazines

Focolare Living City and New City Press, New York, USA -

<https://livingcitymagazine.com/>

<https://www.newcitypress.com/>

Focolare New City and New City Publishing House, Welwyn Garden City, United Kingdom -

New City Publishing – New City Books and New City Magazine

<https://www.newcity.co.uk/>

<https://www.newcity.co.uk/the-magazine/>

New City, Philippines –

New City Philippine Edition – New City Magazine and Books

<https://newcityph.net/>

Do not be afraid

Sermon by Fr Bruno Carrera, Telecast Catholic Mass from Melbourne, Sunday 9 Aug 2020

According to the experts, “Do not be afraid” is the most repeated command in the Bible.

The disciples needed that assurance because Jesus had already given them plenty of reasons to be afraid. He had warned them that they would be persecuted and universally hated, handed over to the Sanhedrin and scourged, and brought before governors and kings. They would even be betrayed by members of their own family.

Difficulties and trials are part of our life and we are called to find in them the opportunity to test the authenticity of our faith and of our relationship with Jesus. And in all this we are not forgotten but always assisted by the attentive concern of the Father. For this reason, in today’s Gospel, Jesus reassures the disciples, saying: “Do not be afraid!”.

I think we love the story of Peter in this Gospel because we can so easily relate to it. In various moments of enthusiasm, we surrender our lives, our will, and our future to God. “Just tell me Lord, what you want me to do and I’ll do it.”

But, at times we are surprised a bit when he takes us up on our offer. However, undaunted, we respond to the call. It could be the call to matrimony or to consecrated life or to serving where we are. And we start with enthusiasm but then the harsh reality of the everyday hard grind sets in. Next come trials and unexpected events. Sometimes we backtrack or even abandon the journey entirely.

But in all this, the Lord continues to tell us, as he did to the disciples of his time: “Do not be afraid!” Let us not forget these words: always, when we experience any trial, any persecution, anything that causes us to suffer, let us listen to the voice of Jesus in our hearts: “Do not be afraid! Go Forth! I am with you!”

Do not fear those who mock you and mistreat you; and do not fear those who ignore you or those who respect you “to your face”, but fight the Gospel “behind your back”. Jesus does not leave us all alone, because we are precious to him. That is why he does not leave us all alone. Each one of us is precious to Jesus and he accompanies us always.

St Augustine imagining that he was addressing Peter, commented: The Lord “leaned down and took you by the hand. With your strength alone you cannot rise. Hold tight to the hand of the One who reaches down to you”, and he did not say this to Peter alone but also to all of us.

The experience of the Prophet Elijah who heard God passing by and the troubled faith of the Apostle Peter enable us to understand that even before we seek the Lord or invoke him, it is He himself who comes to meet us, who lowers Heaven to stretch out his hand to us and raise us to his heights; all he expects of us is that we trust totally in him, that we really take hold of his hand.

Now I would like to share with you the amazing story of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Alexander was a novelist, a philosopher, a historian, and a political prisoner. An outspoken critic of

Communist Russia, he had criticised Joseph Stalin and for this reason he had been jailed for 8 years. Later he was sent to the Gulag in Siberia for another 5 years.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been in the Gulag, a Soviet prison camp in Siberia. He had been forced to do backbreaking labour until he came to the point of exhaustion. With little food and little rest, he was constantly watched by guards and never allowed to communicate with another human being.

Never permitted a newspaper or magazine from the outside, he came to believe that he was forgotten by everyone, even God.

In his despair, he decided to commit suicide, but he could not reconcile that act with the teachings of the Gospel. Then he decided to end his misery by trying an escape, knowing that he would surely be shot. In his mind he worked out that his death would then be at the hands of another and not his own doing.

The appointed day came when he would put his fateful plan into action. Sitting under a tree during a brief respite from work, he glanced at the guards to see where they were positioned.

Just as he started to jump and run, a prisoner he had never seen before stood in front of him. Looking into his eyes, Solzhenitsyn said he could see more love than he had ever seen before emanating from the eyes of another human being.

The prisoner stooped down with a small twig in his hand and began to draw the symbol of the cross in the soil of Soviet Russia.

When Solzhenitsyn saw the cross, he knew God had not forsaken him. He knew God was right there beside him in his deepest pit.

Little did he realize that at that very moment, Christians all over the world were praying for his release, and within three days he would be sitting in Geneva, Switzerland, a free man.

Amen

Stay in touch, being alone does not come naturally!

Reminder to talk to each other by telephone and social media and a helpful check on the vulnerable.

Suggest for each of us to regularly contact at least one vulnerable person, such as 'People alone'.

COVID-19: Pope offers prayer to Virgin Mary for protection

Pope Francis composed a prayer to Our Lady, Health of the Sick, to implore her protection during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick.

At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith.
You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need.

We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us:

He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/pope-francis-prayer-our-lady-protection-coronavirus.html>

A Prayer for Uncertain Times

God of the present moment,

God, who in Jesus, stills the storm and soothes the frantic heart:

Bring hope and courage to us as we wait in uncertainty.

Bring hope that you will make us the equal of whatever lies ahead.

Bring us courage to endure what cannot be avoided, for your will is health and wholeness;

You are God, and we need you. Amen

Source - New Zealand Anglican Prayer Book

A Prayer for Health and Solidarity

During this time of isolation, may we continue to keep our hearts open to our human family around the world.

May we, who have access to medical facilities and services, remember those who do not have basic health care.

May we, coming to terms with the effects of this pandemic, remember the words of scripture "Be still and know that I am God".

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

From Caritas Australia

Musicians and Music Ministries Connect Online

Gen Rosso -

<https://www.genrosso.com/>

Concert Event 2020 (Short Edition) Premiered 12 Aug 2020

Gen Verde –

<https://www.genverde.it/index/>

50 Countries Affected By COVID-19 Sing Amazing Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA7pdABvpnc&list=RDPUtil3mNj5U&index=2>

The Arab World Blessing In two weeks, 67 people from 16 Arab nations came together to record this blessing. Many other versions of this blessing are being recorded around the Arab world. Premiered on 7 Jun 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy0v69p5Jik>

The Blessing in Hebrew! HA BRACHA הברכה Jerusalem, Israel - Joshua Aaron
Premiered on 13 Jun 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzqrWae5IK4>

Churches United - The Blessing, Singapore - by 772 singers - from 177 Churches and Movements Premiered on 31 May 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wg1jqYmyWdU&list=TLPQMTgwODIwMjB1KBx-kz9Rgg&index=2>

From the Editors

The first Health 2020 Newsletter was published on 19 April 2020. Positive feedback and material received for future Newsletters has encouraged the health (green) New Humanity group (Mario, Ann-Marie, and Martin) to continue publishing during the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

The theme for this edition is that when our soul abandons itself to God and has for some time made the law of 'believing in love' its own, God shows himself. Through the transformation the soul sees that from every trial it gathers new fruits

As the saying goes "we are all in this together", but some are in much deeper than others and many are finding the going tough. Many are rising to the occasion, some can 'pivot' deftly, and others are even relishing it, finding that 'business' is going well. Or we might have more 'me time' we can dedicate to self-improvement, pursuing hobbies, developing new interests, or simply contemplating. All good if we maintain physical distancing and exceptional hygiene habits – for our own and the greater good.

A quotation that resonates during these challenging times:

"Be patient where you sit in the dark. The dawn is coming." - Rumi



Holding together, keeping apart across Oceania

(David Popes "Holding Together, Keeping Apart"
artwork.)

The purpose of the Health 2020 Newsletter is communication on what is happening around us with the COVID-19 virus, such as -

1. Official news from the Focolare Movement, such as latest news from Emmaus, the Church leaders, and other relevant leaders (e.g. useful links)
2. Extracts from living the Gospel and from the 12 Points of the Focolare spirituality as reminders and encouragement for us living each day. (e.g. Chiara and her companions did not really realise the 2nd World War had ended because they were so intent in living the Gospel)
3. Useful links to daily church services, such as Catholic Masses, Anglican, Uniting Church services and other religious services from other faith communities that are readily accessible using the modern communication means
4. Relevant and responsible news on aspects of the green regarding the virus (such as physical, mental, spiritual health)
5. List of telephone numbers that people in the local communities of the Focolare Movement can contact if they need appropriate assistance due to the virus
6. Reminder to talk to each other by telephone and social media and a helpful check on the vulnerable
7. Reminder on the Cube of Love (download)
8. Extracts on living the will of God and keeping Jesus in the Midst at a distance
9. Ask for sharing of useful ideas to learn from each other
10. Customise to suit each Country/State/Territory (such as language, contact details)

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Keep in Contact

A 2020 Health Group has set up a WhatsApp site for those working or interested in physical, mental, or spiritual health. If you or others are interested in joining please contact the Editors listed above with your telephone number and Email address.