

The Health 2020 (green) Newsletter

Version: 30 April 2020

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 publish earlier than anticipated.

The two themes for this edition are the transformation that occurs through the presence of the Divine in suffering, and for each of us to be of service for others as well as our own safety.

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.

Open Invitation

Your feedback and input are sought for including in future editions of this Newsletter. Any relevant experiences, important sources of information, things that work for you, particularly related to the COVID-19 virus are welcome for sharing. Send to the Editors listed above. **Looking forward to receiving your responses, input, and experiences.**

The Mysterious Presence of God in Suffering

The following text by Chiara Lubich touches on a subject that the current pandemic has brought much into evidence: suffering. It helps us to perceive a mysterious presence of God in suffering, since nothing escapes his love. This genuinely Christian approach instils hope and encourages us to make every suffering our own, those that affect us directly or that of the people around us.

... Suffering! The suffering which at times affects our whole being and the suffering which crops up and blends bitterness with sweetness in daily life.

Suffering: an illness, a misfortune, a trial, a painful circumstance...

Suffering!

How should we ... consider the suffering which is always ready to appear in all our lives? How can we define it, how identify it? What name can we give it? Whose voice is it?

If we consider suffering from a human point of view, we are tempted to look for its cause either within us or outside of us, in human wickedness for example, or in nature or other things. And all this might actually be true. But if we think only in these terms, we forget what matters most. We forget that behind the story of our lives there is the love of God who wills or permits everything for a higher purpose, which is our own good.

That is why the saints take every painful circumstance they encounter directly from the hands of God. It is impressive how they never go wrong in this regard. For them, suffering is the voice of God and nothing else. Immersed as they are in the Scripture, they understand what suffering is and must be for a Christian; they grasp the transformation that Jesus worked in suffering, seeing how he changed it from a negative factor into a positive one.

Jesus himself is the explanation of their suffering: Jesus crucified.

For this reason, it even becomes lovable, it even becomes something good. That is why they do not curse suffering, but bear it, accept, and embrace it.

If we too open the New Testament, we will find this attitude confirmed.

Didn't St James say in his letter, "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy" (Jas 1:2)? So, suffering can even be a cause for joy.

After having invited us to take up our cross and follow Him, doesn't Jesus then affirm, "Those who lose their life" (and this is the height of suffering) "will find it" (Mt 10:39)?

Suffering therefore is hope of salvation.

For St Paul, suffering is even something to boast of, indeed the only thing to boast of: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14). Yes, for those who consider it from a Christian viewpoint, suffering is something great: it even makes it

possible for us to complete in ourselves the passion of Christ, for our own purification and for the redemption of many.

So then, what can we say to those who are struggling with suffering? What can we wish for them? How can we relate to them?

First of all, let us approach them with the greatest respect. Even though they may not think so, at this time they are being visited by God. ... Let's assure them of our continual thoughts and prayers, so that they may be able to take all that distresses and causes them suffering directly from the hands of God, and unite it to Jesus' passion so that it can bear the greatest fruit.

Let us help them to always have the value of suffering present before them.

And let us remind them of that marvellous Christian principle of our spirituality, in which suffering, when loved as a countenance of Jesus crucified and forsaken, can be changed into joy.

Chiara Lubich

Taken from a telephone conference call, Rocca di Papa, 25th December 1986.

Published in C. Lubich, On the Holy Journey, New City Press, New York 1988, pp. 162-164

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 message from Cardinal John Dew, from Wellington, New Zealand from his Facebook page



“To be of service means to give of ourselves. In the last few weeks all around the world we have seen incredible examples of service during this Covid-19 pandemic, people in all walks of life serving others often heroically. Here in Aotearoa there have been wonderful examples of people providing essential services for others, in roles that we have often taken for granted, putting themselves at risk as they generously serve the community. Each of us serves by staying at home, which we do for others as well as our own safety. This Easter we are learning new things about service.”

Shared Experiences

Ian from the Men Focolare in Wellington – New Zealand: COVID-19 outcomes

We have started here in Wellington, as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic a series of Zoom groups to keep in contact with each other.

One of these stands out because it is with a group of Seniors who have since the lockdown not been able to get out and about and even in some cases are completely house bound.

The technology in itself was a challenge but through phone calls and trials and explanations the group managed to get up and running. Unfortunately, two of the group felt that the technology was beyond their reach so we are hoping and praying that we can help them gently make that leap into the heavenly experience.

I say heavenly experience because when we finally met online, they had not seen each other for close on two months because the last Word of Life meeting had been 2 months ago and so it was a celebration of connection through seeing the other and celebrating together and sharing where we are all at in this unusual situation.

The realization for me was how important it is to actually see each other. One of the questions that was asked was what we were missing the most. One person replied just the possibility of seeing other people even if one does not actually talk to them. Another getting together for a coffee.

So essentially out of this experience, we of the older generation are benefiting hugely from the lockdown in the sense that we have found a way to connect with the house bound and this as long as we can get to share the technology of connecting meaningfully.

Focolare Linkup on 28th March 2020: Alberto Marsilio, family doctor - Venice, Italy

My name is Alberto. I live in Mira in the province of Venice and I am a family doctor. I have been doing this job for 30 years and I have never had to deal with such a difficult situation. Since the coronavirus epidemic broke out here too ... we, family doctors, are the first to have contact with the people. You will understand that we no longer stick to working hours. However, at a certain point, my own scenario changed.

I was informed that a colleague with whom I had worked a few days earlier had tested positive for the coronavirus and she was in hospital. That meant I had to go into so-called quarantine, being isolated at home. So, suddenly, I was on the other side of the fence. I too had the same worries and anxieties as my patients. Fortunately, the results of the swabs taken were negative and after a few days I was able to go back to work. Of course, the spirit I did it with was rather different, I had entered more into my patients' experience, into their shoes.

During these days, every day, I try to call them, to phone and find out how they are. And with some a bond has also been created that goes beyond the simple doctor-patient relationship. One man told me: "Look, doctor, I won't lose touch with you even when this difficult time has passed."

In fact, it is still a matter of continuing to live in this way, keeping in mind what we call the Golden Rule, that is, treat others as you would have them treat you. And perhaps my time in quarantine has helped me to live like this a bit more.

After Toti Ingrassia, a *focolarino* from Milan, caught coronavirus, it took 15 days in a hospital and intensive care to recover. His is a story of hope, solidarity and so many life lessons.

You can never be too careful. So **Toti Ingrassia, 62, an educator** who had a clinical record of other illnesses, had been locked up in the house for three weeks, well before the lockdown. Then suddenly came a fever that disrupted everything.

He would not be the only one: another member of the Focolare community in Milan was also infected, and four others would also be quarantined at home for 15 days. His visit to the family doctor confirmed that his symptoms were from Covid-19, and Toti and his friend were taken to Milan's Polyclinic in the same ambulance.

The emergency room halls and corridors were filled with screams, anxiety, and tension. Coronavirus puts a strain on people and structures, and its spread was booming and affecting everyone. We are all in the same boat, and that makes us equal, fragile passengers.

Toti primarily felt the fear of not knowing. He was suddenly thrown into an incomprehensible situation, feeling existentially naked, and not knowing if and when he had gone past a point of no return. In a time of coronavirus, going through the doors of a hospital is like crossing the borders from the world that we know. Visually you navigate into the unknown.

The only thing left from his former life was his mobile phone and some personal belongings. **In this middle world of the intensive care unit, it was as if he was suddenly in a science fiction film.** Bedridden, he noted that his roommates were all connected to tubes and wearing some sort of helmet to be able to breathe.

Lively, dynamic and used to an active life, he was taken by all the discomfort. He had never imagined himself in such a state of complete impasse, imprisoned, nailed to the bed. He started shaking. Doctors realized this and put him to sleep with an injection.

He woke up a few hours later, with a breathing apparatus on his face. "I tried right away to remove it," he remembers. "I couldn't stand it, but the more I pulled on my helmet, the more I hurt myself because it was hooked under my armpits."

A nurse, one of those you never forget, told him gently and clearly, **"Either the helmet or die!"**

Toti took in the extreme drama in which he found himself. There was no way to fight it. In front of him, a crucifix hung on the wall. "But what do you want from me?" was his inner cry. "There I understood, and I said my 'yes'. I remembered a phrase by Chiara Lubich that says that **nothing can be built without pain.**"

There were five unforgettable days in intensive care. Toti saw three people die in one night, when the doctors beat their fists on a table in desperation because they could not save them.

"I missed everything. My family. My companions of the Focolare," he remembers.

In such extreme circumstances, support and encouragement came from those around him. Another memorable nurse said: "I live for you. Let us go on together!" It was an injection of trust, resilience, bravery.

Toti had a roommate, and she and he were both exhausted, without the strength even to speak. They communicated only by gestures, encouraging and supporting each other while they were so close.

Any sense of time disappeared, and only the present remained to unfold, as if on a mountain ridge. There you could only love with small gestures, signs and prayers that help you live because you give of yourself, despite everything, and whatever way you can, for others. This is what saves even these situations.

After five days, after the acute stage, Toti's helmet was removed, and nurses tried to help him stand up. His strength was not there, and his breathing was powered by an oxygen cylinder, but Toti slowly managed to sit down, helped by all the drip bags that feed him or drain liquids.

He got up as if it were the first time in his life. "I was like a baby taking its first steps." Reaching the corridor of the ward, the doctors and nurses applauded him for a long time. It was a liberating anthem, and deep emotion ran through him. These were people who lived for him, who gave their all to keep him alive.

After 15 days in the hospital and becoming five kilos lighter, he returned home on Holy Thursday. **His other Focolare friend also recovered from the virus.** Toti was clinically cured, even if it took two other clinical visits to ensure that the disease was completely defeated.

“This experience really shaped me,” he says. **“What really counts are authentic and sincere relationships, where you care for one another using your heart.** When I left the hospital, I wrote to all the staff because I felt a lot of love, an atmosphere of family.

“It is not true that you die alone. I saw with my own eyes how close the doctors and nurses were to patients up to the very end. **They are angels for those who suffer.”**

Service Offered for Distress by the Effects of the Coronavirus

From Dr Norm Rose -

Like many other retired medical practitioners, I was recently re-registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) to be of service during the COVID-10 pandemic as a psychiatrist. I no longer have any dedicated prescription pads and I no longer see my role as working in formal psychiatry. Also, in my retirement I no longer need to charge for my services.

What I can offer to the Focolare Movement in our zone is my psychotherapeutic and tele-psychiatry experience together with my experience in counselling disaster victims, free of charge. Above all I know how to listen.

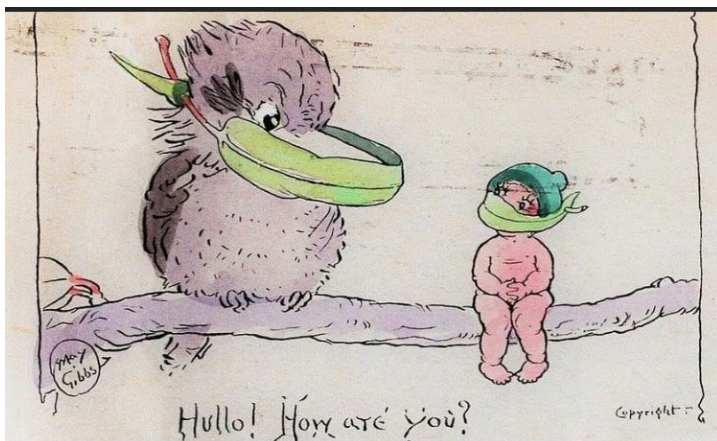
I do not wish to provide second opinions or make suggestions about treatment by other practitioners.

Rather I offer myself via telephone and/or Skype or Zoom as a support for those in the Focolare community within our zone who are distressed by the effects of the coronavirus.

[Contact details – Telephone: 0409352834](tel:0409352834) [Email: 579nrose@gmail.com](mailto:579nrose@gmail.com)

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’.



May Gibbs, 1919 Spanish flu pandemic
(from Lorraine Lipson,
Melbourne, Australia)

Poem

The Great Tribulation

Based on Matthew 24
Easter Sunday, 12 April 2020
By Robert McClean
Wellington, New Zealand

This is a great tribulation
Our doubts surround us
We have seen the signs from overseas
Infections taking root from travelling
Like a tree growing new leaves
We could see this coming from afar
From our social media screens
The end was coming near

This is a great tribulation
No doubt about it
Despite the Easter festival
We remain in our upper rooms
Locked down in our hometowns
Overwhelmed by fear and concern
For while we might live
Others may not

This is a great tribulation
Doubts we have
Above us, no planes fly above
On the highway, the road is quiet
The suburban streets are deserted
Boats do not intrude out on the sea
While we can speak
Others receive the silent virus

This is a great tribulation
Our doubts confront us
We cannot flee up into high mountains
Find streams of peace and green pastures
Or sail for safety over oceans
There is nowhere to go
We live home today
But others will not

*For we all walk through the valley under
the shadow of death*

This is a time
Without a doubt a new springtime
We can all be kinder to each other
Build warm homes of safety and
nourishment
Health care for all and food for the poor
The Earth can restore and living wages
just
For there is no other planet we can go
We all live together

At home
As one human family
Where Jesus returns in the love of many
that does not grow cold

To return to 'normal' would be a great
calamity