

The Health 2020 (green) Newsletter

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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.

Kindness and Love in a Time of Separation

I am struck that the 'Kindness Pandemic Group' on Facebook has over half a million members. Half a million people who want to make a difference in our world where separation from others could easily lead us to bunker down and wallow in our own situation.

I've never lived in a war-torn country and yet those who have, often speak of the extraordinary kindness that brings people together in a time of adversity, small gestures as well as bigger ones where people have even given their lives for a stranger. As human beings we are made, hard-wired you might say, to be in relationship with others.

Focolare is an international movement working for unity and dialogue. Originating in the Catholic Church it has spread to the other Christian denominations, to the major world faiths and includes those of no religious affiliation. It has its roots in wartime northern Italy. Amidst the ruins of the bombs, Chiara Lubich, founder of Focolare, discovered God as Love, and whatever the circumstances, that the love of God is a constant, where nothing or no one can separate us from that Love.

Love of God and consequently love of neighbour. Take the image of a tree, the deeper our roots, the taller the tree. One nourishes the other.

The 'Hymn to Love' from Christian Scripture, in First Corinthians¹, describes perfectly what it means to love:

'Love is always patient and kind

Love is never jealous

Love is not boastful or conceited

It is never rude and never seeks its own advantage

It does not take offence or store up grievances

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but finds joy in the truth

It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes'.

Part of Focolare's spirituality of unity is what we call the '**Art of Loving**'. Simplified into six principles which form the different sides of a cube, it can be adapted to different situations. Here is a version of '**the cube of love**', developed by Focolare members in Australia and New Zealand who work in the health profession. It can be downloaded as an app. The six phrases are very apt for these times of separation. I will illustrate them with some life experiences from our Focolare members which have been shared with me in the last few weeks.



- '**Care for everyone**': the possibilities to reach out are many and take us beyond our living rooms. Since March we have organised a weekly Mass (Prayer Service) online which brings together people of all ages to pray and encourage one another in these most unusual of separated times. Next Sunday we will be holding an online conversation to promote mental well-being in this time of lockdown.
- '**Treat everyone with dignity**': this week I was moved to hear a young nurse who works in a Melbourne hospital describe the extra care he takes in washing and preparing the bodies of those who have died with Covid-19, overcoming fear for his own situation. He spoke too of the phone calls to families at the passing of a loved one and the time taken to listen and console them.

¹ 1 Cor 13:2-7

- **‘Ease the pain of others’**: a lady who lost her husband a couple of years ago has been reaching out to others who have lost a spouse in the last few months - in this time of lockdown and separation - to ring and assure them they are not alone.
- **‘Be first to care’**: several times I have opened our front door to discover the kindness of a friend who has gone shopping and decided to share it generously with us. This happened just before the stage 4 lockdown. Looking at the quantity we immediately thought we could share it with someone whose job has been cut by two days due to the pandemic. We have experienced when we give, we receive, we give to someone else and we receive again. Sure enough the next day another friend brought a cooked meal.
- **‘Build relationships’**: two young men have been cooking and taking a hot meal for a homeless man nearby. Another group has been involved regularly in a food van. The comment of the coordinator was poignant: those coming are not necessarily there for the sandwiches but for the warmth of human friendship.
- **‘Focus on those most challenging’**: love urges us to go towards those we find it harder to get on with or where an extra effort is required. One lady described how she has been encouraging her grandchildren to write letters and post them to their grandfather who is in an aged care facility. He suffers from dementia and often feels forgotten.

These six points invite us to reach out to others with an act of kindness and love. Love by its very nature spreads, it becomes mutual, it brings about change. Love builds community. And an act of love is something we can always do whether we are physically next to someone or on the other side of a screen.

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Presented in a virtual event on 9 August 2020 at the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia (JCMA) panel discussions reflecting on the effects of COVID-19 on our communities and the challenges and lessons learned. <http://jcma.org.au/>