

Contribution from the Focolare Movement to the Secretariat of the Synod

1. INTRODUCTION

Two-tiered path: with the local Church and within the Movement

The members of the Focolare Movement (Opera di Maria) have lived the synodal process from a dual perspective:

- as members of diocesan councils, collaborating in local proposals aimed primarily at listening to realities outside ecclesial life (*Italy and other countries in Europe*); promoting and raising awareness for participation (*Hong Kong and Macau*); engagement in ecclesial realities at various levels (bishops' conferences, dioceses, parishes, and Catholic institutions), where members of the Movement of different vocations already collaborate (*Africa*). In the Holy Land, 13 Movements and New Communities gathered at various times around the theme: *Synodality and the contribution that Movements and New Communities can make to the synodal journey of the Church in the Holy Land*. In Brazil, some people approached the most needy and discriminated against, so as not to lose anyone on the way. Brothers and sisters from other Churches were also involved, creating a climate of reciprocity that generates communion (*Mexico, Caribbean, Central and Andean America*).
- participants in the synodal process as the family of the Work of Mary.

This summary document is presented from the second perspective, presenting the results of lived experience within the Focolare Movement.

Value of the experience

The experience was lived as: "the beginning of a new path, to be continued" (Europe), "dedication and effort to focus participation within the Movement in consonance with the Church" (Asia), "an opportunity for an examination of conscience about our way of life" (Africa), "a journey full of responsibility and joy" (Brazil).

In Italy, a large number of groups (58%) devoted themselves to addressing the issues of listening and dialogue. The contributions show that the meetings held turned out to be true workshops in which the value of reciprocity was rediscovered. Most of the responses on listening to the aspirations and the cry of suffering humanity referred to interpersonal listening, signifying that the first "cry" we must learn to listen to is that of those around us.

The synodal journey was a great opportunity to look at our walking together (*Europe*): *"The discovery and gift of the Synod: we were trying to answer the questions, and*

as we did so, we discovered how much good it did us to talk about these various issues! Thank you, Synod!" (Russia – Eastern Europe).

The Synod immerses us in a process of changing our ways of being and doing: to stop, rethink and, being faithful to the Gospel, to creatively give an updated response to the questions of humanity today (*Southern Cone, South America*).

"The moments of sharing made for a beautiful, new and enriching experience. Reflecting together on the proposed topics was an opportunity for synodality." "We understood that walking together also means taking ownership of the good choices of our fellow travelers" (Middle East, Africa).

The experience of the synodal process has not only been one of reflection, but also one of conversion. The Synod invites us to look forward, yet also back and around us, to see whom we have left behind on the road (*Southern Cone*).

Lights of the path

Among the lights "experienced," we primarily find the experience of deep, open, and welcoming listening, constructive dialogue and fraternal communion rooted in love for Jesus crucified and forsaken (cf. Mk. 15:34), the courage to dream together, and also the boldness to "put our finger" in our wounds. One senses that in this way we come to a deeper communion with Him, through the sincere exchange of views, thoughts... Different opinions help us to reflect, even if we do not always come to understand them completely. It came out that the spirit of family which the Movement proposes is much desired, and in many places it is already lived out simply and concretely (*Europe*).

The East Asian communities report that they have rediscovered how much the charism of unity sheds light on their own cultures, offering a renewed understanding of the spirituality of communion, a mirror of the synodal Church. It has given them new courage in the face of the many challenges facing the Work of Mary, the Church and humanity. This work is opening our horizons: we need to become aware of how important is the involvement of members of the Movement in local ecclesial realities, to value, encourage and support them.

It was important to become aware of this historical moment in the Church, and take the steps expected of us (*Africa*). In the journey of conversion to which the Synod invites us, we understood that what we sometimes call the "periphery" (existential, geographical, cultural, etc.), the result of a self-referential view, may become the "center." From Africa they write, *"We have realized that we need to work even harder to reach communities far from the centers and big cities."* Secondly, we should recognize the idea of revitalizing the center (rather than erasing it), because there are values and structures there that need to be revived.

Shadows on the path

In some geographical areas there was difficulty related to the time available for this consultation. Weaknesses identified during the process include:

- Stereotypical, not attentive language of the listener.
- The danger of remaining closed in on ourselves.
- Existing tensions and polarizations in society can be experienced even among us
- The burden of listening to majority social opinions and compared with Church teaching.

2. ESSENCE OF THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT: DISCERNMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS GATHERED

Well aware of the richness of what emerged from the consultation, we opted for a collection of contributions gathered from every continent according to *five pairs of core topics*. While running the risk of repeating similar concepts, we preferred to avoid a forced systematization that would not respect and retain different cultural nuances or perspectives. Geographical origins are indicated in brackets.

2.1 Path and mission

Walking together

Walking together well describes the *style* that distinguishes a member of the Focolare Movement. During retreats and various *forums*, we form ourselves according to the “spirituality of communion” that stems from the charism of unity. This includes a moment of “fraternal correction” (cf. Mt. 18:15-17) that we call the “moment of truth”. It includes private conversations, daily meditation and the sharing of experiences arising from the life of the Word that has been read and meditated on (*North America*). We feel that we are part of humanity on a journey where fellow travelers are those with whom we share a section of road, in the Movement, everywhere. The spirituality of unity pushes us toward an inclusive experience in solidarity with all, even if from different perspectives (*Italy - Europe*). In particular, we reach out to those who wish to share their lives in terms of spirituality, family, work, religion etc., but also with “*in a broader sense, all those who love God and aspire to fulfil the words of Jesus: ‘that they may all be one (Ut omnes)’ (Middle East)*” and with “*...all those who love God, who believe in the sacredness of life.*” (*Central West Africa*).

A diverse people open to all...but it is not always easy

In Europe and beyond, the Focolare Movement presents a distinctive ecumenical profile, with members and adherents who are Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, members of free churches and Orthodox. These distinctions do not prevent us from feeling that we are one “people,” with different ages and vocations, a family careful not to “lose anyone.” Nevertheless, we sometimes note that the frenzy of our times, social or cultural disparity, or extreme situations in the country where one lives can cause a loosening of relationships and the risk of looking at people according to rigid, predefined patterns. This communion-fellowship also embraces other ecclesial realities, religious orders, associations, and movements, including those of a cultural

or social nature. The commitment is to remain attentive to the needs of those near and far, encouraging dialogue even with those who do not have religious beliefs. Significant in this regard is the shared journey among European communities and movements (*Together for Europe*) as well as the commitment of the Politics for Unity Movement (*Europe, Brazil, Southern Cone*).

Movement members in Asian zones recognize that sometimes people are excluded *de facto*, for instance those with a certain sexual orientation, or simple, uneducated people who do not know how to or cannot use modern means of communication. A concern shared by many is related to the risk of a certain self-exclusion when some members remain committed only within the activities of the Movement (*Asia*). In the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and Pakistan, many are engaged in social service to the poor, the Church and religious communities, either on a personal basis or as a community, including collaboration with other church communities and civic organizations. From India there have been reports of the persistence of a social model that does not offer the same space for freedom and participation (e.g., women and people with little recognized *social status*) is reported. The Movement feels it must prioritize helping women and those with psychological difficulties (*Asia*). “...*We exclude those with different ideas (e.g., homosexuals). Unfortunately, even people with mental health problems are sometimes excluded*” (*Central West Africa*).

Caring for community life and mission: a challenge

Sometimes, on the one hand, a certain bureaucratic management of topics that interest the local community prevails. On the other hand, some initiatives are insufficiently coordinated, spontaneous, carried out individually and shared only afterwards when things are finished. People who approach our communities often do not get involved, and this is also the case with young people. If “exclude” seems too strong an expression, sometimes we are not able to work together with those who have other cultural or religious reference points. We exclude when we do not know how to integrate or give a role in the work to be carried out together (*Southern Cone*).

In today’s politically polarized North American culture, we struggle to establish points of contact with those in our communities who express views that reflect the radicalized *media*, antithetical to the Gospel message and/or against the teachings of Pope Francis. An obstacle to engagement is the tendency to “privatize” religious life and spirituality to the point that it is difficult to share our commitments with people outside our circles. During the *lockdown*, many families did not have the money to buy food, so we collaborated with local politicians and took on the task of bringing resources to the community, working together with other Churches and Christian agencies, creating, after the two years, a deeper connection with them (*North America*).

In Brazil, there is no one way of living community life; each person decides how to hold meetings (for example, the Word of Life meeting: reading, meditation and sharing experiences). Meetings are held in neighborhoods or chapels far from the

city center, diversifying the *format*, with a space for welcoming, listening and dialogue, rehearsals of singing, sharing and reflection on the practice of Christian life. Everyone is invited: those who participate in parish and diocesan life, the *Fazenda da Esperança*, anyone who so desires, trying not to exclude anyone in our actions and projects. It seems necessary, however, to open up even more in interpersonal relationships, because in some situations we perceive a certain distance and isolation when we need to act as a community. There are moments of communion when differences of opinion can generate a renewed exercise in the search for unity. Unfortunately, in a number of situations we exclude someone; we do not devote ourselves enough to reaching closeness with everyone, for example, with those who do not have access to technologies, those who lack schooling or refined ways of speaking, with those who think differently. We are fragile, and there is no denying that there is a risk of wanting to dialogue only with those who have more affinity with us (*Brazil*).

“(Greater) openness to welcome everyone opens up the possibility for needed changes so that everyone feels like family and for those with religious beliefs to increasingly recognize that those with other beliefs are also recognized as included in Jesus’ last will and testament (cf. Jn. 17:21). Just as we seek to recognize the identity of others, so we would like ours to be recognized” (Dialogue Group with People of Non-Religious Beliefs – Brazil). “Involuntarily we tend to exclude those who are different or think differently. In fact, we have few relationships with people of other Churches and religions. We do not seek out those who claim to be non-believers or who do not want to engage with us, or those who have moved away from the Movement...” (Middle East)

Training to go out to everyone

“...We lack training to go out to everyone. There is a growing need to go out, not to feel comfortable only among ourselves.” We feel the need for a deep spiritual and human formation, to acquire a greater openness, to open up our hearts and be able to embrace everyone, overcoming our mindset (*Middle East*).

We do not always employ the right language for inclusion or dialogue with those from different backgrounds or perspectives. We should continue to look for new ways to reach others, hence the need for an effort to be more attentive to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (*North America*).

In the East Asian community, some note that we spend time and energy on formation yet do not slow down the hectic pace of today’s society, which makes us believe we have no time for those who are suffering. Sometimes we lack the courage to publicly oppose those pseudo-values and practices in society that harm the common good, for example, actions harmful to the environment (*Asia*).

2.2 Word and Eucharist

Sharing the Word, life experiences and the Eucharistic bread

Throughout the world the pandemic caused us to stop and give more value to

prayer. Online prayers among different groups (the rosaries for Myanmar, for the war in the Ukraine, Latin-American families, for the end of the pandemic and for the preparation of the General Assembly 2021, etc.) were brought ahead faithfully over the past two years. We kept in mind very much the directive from Chiara Lubich *to live the three communions,* that is, *“letting oneself be lived by the Word, receiving the Eucharist so as to be more and more Jesus and communicating with your brother or sister so that mutual love may grow.”* Nourishing ourselves with the Word and the Eucharist enables us to freely offer our time and even our life itself. Listening to the Word of God and the communion of our experiences, however, sometimes boils down to a personal letting off steam, or the search for quick solutions to problems. This superficial attitude requires careful listening on the part of the others, free from the worry of giving immediate answers, to love the other with a participation in his experience made of empathy and loving kindness. Attentive participation in Mass, approaching the table of the Word and the Eucharist, allows us to start again with more enthusiasm to translate the love received from God into daily actions (*Italy – Europe*). Nevertheless, the celebration is not always attractive, and is not experienced as an encounter with Jesus and with brothers and sisters. There are texts that are read but not understood, the homilies do not help understanding, the laity are not sufficiently trained biblically and theologically on the meaning of the sacraments (*Italy, Europe – North America*).

In communities where there are members of other Churches, praying more together sometimes appears “too Catholic.” Instead, the sharing of life that springs from the Word of God and the communication of experiences is very strong (*Europe*). Our meetings often include the Eucharistic celebration and/or moments of ecumenical or interreligious prayers (*Africa – Middle East*).

In various African countries, monthly radio programs are organized with the reading of the month’s Word of Life and the sharing of lived experiences. In Asia there is a focus on ensuring different styles of meetings. The practice of living and sharing experiences about the monthly Word of life is considered a powerful means of evangelization.

In India one senses a need to improve the way meetings are organized. Those who recognize themselves in the context of Asian culture feel the commitment to overcome the limit that pushes them to remain silent and not to speak about difficulties. They also want to use public meeting spaces, outside sacred places, and to encourage the involvement of young people who feel freer there. The Filipino community suggests adopting a synodal style in meetings, in which the process of listening and building relationships comes before the program. In Brazil there is a desire to continually return to the practice of writing and recounting our experiences as a result of the lived Word, also using technology and social media. There are some virtual groups where this sharing of experiences of the Word happens constantly. The experience of our communities who follow many prisoners, who look to the Eucharist as a source of life for their daily life, has been significant.

2.3. Listening and dialogue

Listening is learned by listening

“Spirituality has taught us the art of listening, but we can improve” (Middle East). “Our style of communication favors mutual listening and the participation of everyone in our meetings, homilies, conferences, private conversations, and dialogues of the most varied kinds. Listening therefore happens, but it must be improved a lot. Our listening to the other is threatened by individualism. We need to improve dialogue by speaking directly to the people involved” (East Africa).

When we experience that we are a “family of families,” we feel we are moving forward in faith; everyone feels free to give his/her own life to brothers and sisters to bear one another’s burdens or joys. However, it is necessary to first establish an atmosphere of kindness and only then, if necessary, to intervene delicately to complete the picture and/or correct something. We believe in *parrhesia*, but we see that sometimes, for fear of being indelicate, it is replaced with a false prudence. We feel called to a purification that requires a way of relating that is more authentic, transparent and without hypocrisy (*Italy – Europe*).

Obstacles to listening and dialogue include: the culture of suspicion; superficiality in relationships; lack of humility; stopping at appearances; forgetting the other’s psychological conditions; prejudices; too much attention to results and not to the person; the frenetic pace of life; the readymade answer; not knowing how to give up one’s initial opinions; closed minds; fundamentalism; clericalism; the defense of one’s own convictions. Other obstacles are any lack of mercy, respect, attention, welcome, *parrhesia*, humility, courage, clarity, empathy, silence, availability, or esteem (*Italy, Europe, Americas, Middle East, Asia and Africa*).

“We recognize that our listening is limited because it is conditioned by beliefs, personal temperaments and cultural heritage that can lead to silence when it comes to expressing something negative. We have much to mature. Only sometimes do we manage to face conflicts and tell the truth with charity” (Brazil).

Parrhesia and dialogue in today’s world

There is a lot of one-way information in our relationships, including through the media, and it is not always possible to experience fraternal exchange. Sometimes we respectfully listen to the other’s point of view, we recognize and accept it, but then we do not modify our actions or decisions. In some circles, the obstacle is clericalism or the idea that “it has always been done this way” (*South Cone*).

“We are learning to state our thoughts openly; we are not used to this because until recently it was unthinkable. Dialogue among us is not yet a culture. It is even more difficult when we have to contradict someone else’s idea, when it seems that one of us is saying something wrong. Then there is the risk that the necessary decisions will not be made” (Central Europe).

Taking the initiative in difficult relationships and “listening” seems to us to be a special contribution that the members of the Movement can offer. For this, a formation in dialogue is necessary to welcome diversity, to be open to criticism, to

speak more openly about ethical issues, celibacy of priests, marriage, gender issues and more (*Western Europe*).

"In countries without complete freedom of speech, people prefer to keep quiet so as not to create embarrassing situations, and thus sometimes do not go into depth" (Eastern Europe).

Southeast Asia and Pakistan underline that the lack of empathy, prejudice, insensitivity towards people in need and personal problems seem to prevent members from listening to those who suffer, and this leads to judgment, indifference, and rejection.

Sometimes people are afraid of debates to "clarify ideas," because they think it creates conflict. Prejudice, staying in one's comfort zone, indifference and insensitivity are the main obstacles to inclusion (*Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and Andean America*). Sometimes *"there is hypocrisy, but not with bad intentions because some people say "Yes" (in Arabic "hader") out of kindness, because they do not want to offend others."* (*Middle East*).

Meeting others, rediscovering one's own identity

In all contexts the communities of the Movement seek relationships of collaboration and dialogue with people of every creed and conviction.

In Asia there are experiences of dialogue in the Philippines and Singapore; of talks about interreligious dialogue with the *Couples for Christ*; interreligious meetings with students; dialogues with other Churches and other religious groups through social activities such as *"Laudato Sì," Living Peace*, etc. In East Asia, the political dialogue program in South Korea has helped members of the Movement understand others' political positions. In Macau, the Anglican Church acts as a *de facto* bridge between Catholics and members of other Christian denominations. In Taiwan, cultural dialogue gives rise to conferences and cooperation with universities (four universities are twinned with the Sophia University Institute – and one has opened a "Chiara Lubich Center for Dialogue"). Southeast Asia testifies that it is possible to collaborate with people of various religions, with non-believers and with those who harbor a grudge against the Church. It is possible to dialogue, without imposing one's own opinions, with young people who declare themselves agnostics, with non-practicing Catholics, with those of the LGBTQ communities and with people who have been affected by scandals involving the clergy. In India, the Focolare community celebrates national holidays together with other groups, and organizes interreligious dialogues led by young people. This helps to close the gap between adults and young people (*Asia*).

At the level of the local community and the Commission for Ecumenism, concrete actions were carried out in terms of dialogue with the Jewish and with the Muslim communities (*Southern Cone*). In Brazil, in the Archdiocese of São Paulo, which promotes interreligious dialogue through the *House of Reconciliation*, there is significant dialogue with the Jewish and Muslim communities and with the different expressions of Buddhism, in particular the Brazilian *Rissho Kosei Kai*.

We feel the need to grow in learning to share our vulnerabilities. Some topics are

too difficult to address in the current political context. When it comes to concrete issues of daily life such as politics, racial or gender issues, there is not always space for mutual listening (*North America, South Cone*).

The *Economy of Communion* project (especially through its industrial parks) offers a significant space for dialogue with everyone (*Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas*). For example, in Cameroon there is a fruitful, cultural dialogue at the university level on the Economy of Communion. Activities such as the “cinema debate” have proven useful for dialogue, in particular with non-believers (*South Cone*).

Being trained for dialogue

From the considerations that have emerged so far, we understand that, although there are many courses of formation in place, a well-inculturated training strategy for dialogue has not yet been developed, and we have not been able to adequately promote the formation possibilities we already have (*Asia, Africa, Americas*). Alternative spaces must also be considered, such as, for example, family environments, in which empathic listening is possible.

In Africa we feel the need to better understand inculturation, which could be a “tool” that allows us to know and appreciate the good in our cultures – to value them in order to enter into dialogue with others. Communities try to respond to their society’s sufferings with creativity through social works or activities supporting children, single mothers, young people, refugees, internally displaced persons (for instance in conflict zones), etc. Community participation in all important moments of life which are social occasions (funerals, weddings), or joining economic support groups is significant. Sometimes, however, “...*One notices self-absorption with the Movement. We need to do more social work together with others*” (*Africa*).

2.4. Community discernment (authority and participation, to discern and decide)

Active participation and the decision-making process

“The consultations should be more valued, and not just remain on paper...” (*Middle East*).

In our ordinary meetings there are no votes in view of a decision; rather, we try to reach maximum consensus even at the cost of reducing the number of topics on which, until then, we had already come to agreement. We want the decision-making processes to be fruit of the life of communion among everyone, but sometimes they are complex. Hierarchically rigid organizational structures, for example, “inhibit” people from sharing experiences in their fullness, as sometimes happens with the “adherents” of the Focolare who, although without particular commitments to the Movement, share its spirit and aims, and participate in its activities (*South Cone*). To avoid passive contentedness, in our local communities we would need to get involved more in joint projects, with all generations, in a natural mindset of inclusion and intergenerationality. Young people can effectively evangelize and act not only within the Movement, but also in the geographical organization of the Church and in the

various ecclesial groups, together with other young people, with the support and trust of adults (*Europe*). Culturally, a pyramid model still exists, but we feel that it will gradually become synodal (*Mexico, Caribbean, Central America, and Andean*).

Basically, there is a strong call, both in theory and practice, to involve everyone, so that leadership is participatory. Sometimes certain decision-making processes are not clear, and so the strongest impose their choices/ideas, or else the group of people with the most influence gives a direction that is not shared by all. When this occurs, divergent opinions can almost be ignored (*Africa*).

Exercise of authority and the experience of fraternity

Despite what has been highlighted so far, in recent years, we note that there has been a considerable change in the vision of the exercise of authority both in the Movement and in the Church, although there are some leaders still linked to methods of the past (that are not very synodal). Therefore, it is important to foster the formation of those who are responsible, enabling greater trust and responsibility for everyone in their particular role, through processes of formation, communication, delegation and accompaniment (*Europe, Asia, Americas, Africa*). *“Authority is practiced in an ever less authoritarian way; co-responsibility and walking together prevail, bearing in mind ‘that greatest love,’ which Jesus asked of Peter. The dynamics of governance make sense for us if they occur in the presence of Jesus in the midst, the only Teacher and guide... His presence is synonymous with generativity, and this requires patience, teamwork, humility, learning from mistakes, and knowing how to delegate”* (*Western Europe*). Nevertheless, in North America, in our local churches we experience a tension between two attitudes: 1) the abuse of authority (still more or less obvious); 2) disregard for authority. We are severely impacted by the challenges related to ecclesiastical or religious authority (in the wake of the scandals caused by abuse perpetrated by some members of the clergy). In North American communities it is difficult to find the balance between realism and naivety, between sound critical reflection and obtuse triumphalism (*“the Church is always right”*). In Asia, however, there is a great deal of respect for the hierarchy, and decisions are often made by a few leaders, who are usually senior in terms of age or rank. This leads to very limited consultation as well as unease among young people. The zone of Southeast Asia and Pakistan has noticed that their cultures sometimes do not favor the frankness necessary for community discernment. In East Asia, mostly rooted in Confucian culture, this attitude is even more evident.

“The decision-making process fails to develop the fruit of a life of communion/fellowship, based on sincerity, collaboration and attention to the inclusion of all, in a true family spirit” (*India*). In Brazil it was suggested to create a workshop for learning to listen and to speak freely, in particular to value listening to young people.

2.5 The specific contribution of the Focolare Movement

Being synodal men and women

“A synodal Church is achieved only if it is made up of ‘synodal people,’ that is, people who have adopted a lifestyle that includes communion, participation and mission, and who put it into practice in their daily lives (within the Movement, in the family, in their professional and social commitments, as members of churches). Perhaps the Movement’s most important contribution to a synodal Church is living and strengthening the practice of the spirituality of communion” (Eastern Europe).

From the contributions received from the various geographical areas of the world, we see that the spirituality of unity which animates the Movement seeks to form ‘synodal people’ quite apart from their geographical and cultural origins, and at the same time, they can take on different ‘hues’ according to the various continents.

One initial characteristic is the way of relating that the members of the Focolare call “making yourself one” (cf. 1 Cor 9, 19-23), or the ability to identify with the other to the point of feeling joys and sorrows with him or her. In this way, the significant contribution that seems recognized is to value the others’ positive aspects, to *“appreciate the others’ charisms, nourishing universal brotherhood” (Italy)*. This approach, which is appreciated both in ecclesial and civil spheres, forms the basis of the relationships and initiatives taken forward by the Movement.

To dialogue, feeling part of the whole of humanity

The Focolare Movement, whose aim is to contribute to the fulfilment of unity, which is the testament of Jesus and the aim of the Church (cf. Jn 17:21), brings about this vocation through dialogues. Its charism at the service of unity encourages members to be involved in different spheres of church life, working in various diocesan bodies: for the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults (*Southern Cone*), for the family (*Europe, Americas, Asia, Africa*), for the Evangelization of Social Engagement (*Southern Cone*), in Catechesis (*Europe, Americas, Asia, Africa*), in the diocesan and national commissions for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, etc. The fraternal relationship with other movements and ecclesial communities is very significant, sharing initiatives, challenges and ideas.

The experience of dialogue promoted among Christians of various Churches is being developed in many countries. In Europe, the opportunity to live the “dialogue of life” with members of the Orthodox Churches (*Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Serbia, Belarus, North Macedonia, etc.*) and those of the various evangelical churches, is emphasized (*Northern and Central Europe*). Living ecumenism is an enormous mutual gift that also enriches one’s own Church. A good number of members of the Movement throughout the world are members of diocesan and national bodies for ecumenical dialogue. Sometimes this basis also gives rise to dialogue with those who do not yet have a relationship with the Church.

In Mexico, Central America, the Andes, and the Caribbean they underline how working in cooperation with institutions and other Churches avoids being self-referential.

Interreligious dialogue seems to be the most mature aspect developed in Asia, for example the friendly and constructive contacts with the Muslim community in the Philippines, the lively and constant relationship with Buddhists in Japan, Thailand, and

Taiwan. In India, respect is underlined as the most important principle at the basis of dialogue, and this does not mean diluting one's own identity. In this sense, the Focolare collaborates with groups and institutions such as the non-profit organization *Shanti Ashram*, the philanthropic group *Somaiya Sanskrit Peetham* and the University of Mumbai.

Social programs such as *Dare to Care* and *Laudato Si* have involved members of other religious communities in Southeast Asia and Pakistan. This was also the case in South America.

The educational contribution of the *School for Dialogue with other Religions*, based in the Philippines, is important. Also significant are the links built in the Holy Land and in various countries of North Africa (*especially Algeria*) with individual Muslims and communities. Similarly, there are links with Jewish institutions in the Southern Cone, North America, and the Holy Land. There are also experiences of dialogue in Africa with those who belong to traditional religions. The Movement promotes groups of dialogue, based around human values, between believers and people of non-religious convictions in various countries of the world: Spain, Argentina, Uruguay, Italy. Many of them participated in the synodal journey. In mixed marriages, dialogue in the family is lived spontaneously with people of other religions and non-believers (*Asia*).

There is also dialogue which takes place between generations and between people of different vocations and states of life. In this sense, as the reflection of the Southern Cone underlines: the gatherings of the Movement open to all vocations and ages (the Mariapolises) become places of formation first of all for young people, for families, and also for seminarians, priests and religious.

Together and "going out" to build universal fraternity

The spirituality of unity leads to careful "listening" to the social reality and its challenges. Particular attention is given to the commitment to bring together different associations or entities (outside of the Movement) for concrete initiatives and reflections in view of fraternity (*Middle East*), or to face social problems proactively and consciously (*Philippines, India, South Cone, North America, Africa*).

The sharing of projects and actions is diversified according to local contexts: care for the environment and conservation of resources (*India, Philippines, Southern Cone*); attention to the well-being of the elderly as a reflection of the respect that one has for them, which is already part of Eastern culture and a consequence of the general aging of the population (*East Asia*); promotion of education and citizenship in a society with a lack of sensitivity to the problems of the poor and excluded (*Brazil*); care for the homeless, with active participation in areas with significant structural social problems (*Harlem, New York, USA*); social projects in the fight against human trafficking (*Southern Cone*); responses to the effects of the pandemic through organized solidarity with significant social impact (for example, "*Manos x Pandemia*," in the *Southern Cone*), ecological and integral ecology projects in various parts of the world (*Europe, Asia, Americas, Africa, Middle East*), etc.

There are paths of inculturation (*Africa*) and interculturality (*Asia, the Americas*,

Oceania) which give answers to concrete needs for ecclesial communion and mission. For example, intercultural dialogue with the different indigenous worlds in Latin America (*Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Mexico*); dialogue with native populations in New Zealand and the Pacific islands. Today, two communities of consecrated persons (focolares) are present in the Amazon.

The Sophia University Institute (SUI - Loppiano) is at the forefront of promoting dialogue with academic culture, carrying out research projects in various areas: interreligious dialogue (for example *Wings of Unity* with Shia Muslims); with political institutions (for example: DIALOP with the European left); with the Orthodox Churches (Patriarch Athenagoras Chair of Studies); with the world of physical and mathematical sciences (Piero Pasolini Chair of Studies). Furthermore, there are three research centers linked to the SUI: the *Evangelii Gaudium* Center (ecclesial life and pastoral theology), *Politics and Human Rights* (foundations of political and legal culture), *Sophia Global Studies* (peace, international relations, and interreligious dialogue).

We also point out the SOPHIA-ALC Institute, with members from various Latin American countries who conduct research activities on the relationship between the charism of unity and contemporary pedagogical guidelines (in the framework of the *Global Compact on Education*).

There is also involvement on a political level through the Politics for Unity Movement in building bridges between people and political leanings, and in reconciliation processes. This also raises awareness of the importance of living as brothers and sisters by sharing experiences, creating spaces for dialogue and bringing us close to them (for example, the *Eco4Leaders* and *Together for a New Africa* projects in Africa, and various projects in South Korea).

The Economy of Communion is a project with a social impact that contributes to the promotion of ideas and actions against poverty and to construct an entrepreneurship renewed by the Gospel. Among its experiences is the important cultural and scientific work around the *EoC* conducted by the Lionello Bonfante Business Park (Loppiano, Italy) and by the entrepreneurial industrial parks in Brazil and Argentina, which also collaborate with the *Economy of Francesco* and with the *Schools of Civil and Biblical Economy*.

Promoting equality between men and women in governance

The Focolare Movement can offer the experience of shared leadership between men and women experienced since its beginning. *“Through mutual listening, by esteeming each other in our diversity of views and visions, we see how fruitful the complementarity is between man and woman” (Eastern Europe).*

“This model, in which we experience authentic equality between men and women, could be applicable to some areas of decision-making and governance in the Church” (Western and Eastern Europe).

3. CONCLUSIONS: NEXT STEPS

Dialogue in the Church and in society

“Do not put up fences,” “Be bridges, leaven, polyhedron” are the recurring expressions – to improve in opening oneself to other spiritualities and other charisms. Being ready not only to give, but also to receive and learn from others (Montet, Switzerland).

“Listening completely is a challenge, especially to those who clearly disagree with our ideas. We should have a more genuine curiosity and not be afraid to work together on a project on which we agree, even if we have fundamental disagreements on other things. We must pay attention to dissenting voices in a group. We must value everyone’s contribution” (North America).

“Avoid self-referentiality, with a deep listening that invites dialogue, acceptance without distinctions, overcoming conflicts with an openness to those who are ‘different” (Mexico, Caribbean, Central and Andean America).

“Learn to live unity in diversity (...) to have the courage to deal with delicate and current issues with an open heart. Know how to stay within tensions and experience the generosity of Jesus in his mercy” (Western Europe).

“Use new, creative approaches, valuing the ‘new wineskins’ (zoom, social media, etc.) and new language to concretely live dialogue and unity” (Italy).

“More openness and inclusiveness for those who identify as LGBTQ” (North America, Brazil, Western and Central Europe, South Cone).

“We propose a profound dialogue with non-believers, agnostics, and atheists about fundamental issues, based on the key values and principles that move us. And we do it without avoiding – but addressing – even difficult issues about which we disagree, with an openness and a ‘disarmed’ receptiveness that allows us to discover a profound inner life and spirituality in everyone. We can also learn from them to be better Christians, more aware that the truth is not our property (a possession), but that together with people of non-religious convictions we walk towards a truth that is gradually revealed to us and that requires contribution from all people of good will” (People of the Movement engaged in dialogue among believers and those who have no religious beliefs).

“As a Church we must find new ways of communicating, which are closer to people, to bring hope, a new vision, propose a different society. Instead of presenting the rigid norms and traditional teachings or ‘downgrading’ the doctrine, to offer an authentic, vital, and visionary message, in ways that are updated to the needs of people today... taking on – as a Church – the mistakes that have been made in the past” (South Cone). UP TO HERE

Networking with other ecclesial and social realities in response to the “cry of humanity”

The challenges that emerge are:

“To improve our listening to those who suffer” (Colombia).

“To stimulate greater awareness among our members on the subject of social justice and the protection of human rights” (Brazil).

“Get involved with others: collaborate, join forces... Take up the proposals and initiatives (of others) as if they were our own decisions. Dialogue and cooperate with all institutions” (Central Europe). “Greater awareness that the communities of the Movement wish to walk with the local church, ecclesial groups, Christians of different denominations and believers of other religions to seek ways of collaborating to respond to the challenges of humanity” (Asia).

Participation by all and shared responsibility. Living synodality in decision-making processes

Two decisive requests from our communities go in the direction of greater participation in decision-making processes and a greater capacity to live synodality in our communities. This involves a synodal exercise of authority in ecclesial life.

“To grow in communication and in the commitment to extend participation to everyone. Clarify the methods for exercising authority in the community” (South Cone).

“The synodal decision-making process (...) is a challenge. Experience shows that it is an enriching and often surprising prospect” (Eastern Europe).

“Make a greater effort to achieve inner freedom; believe that the Holy Spirit is in everyone, have the courage to say your own opinion and know how to ‘lose it’ in dialogue with others” (Central Europe).

“In Asia, generally, in cultures influenced by Confucianism, we are faced with a culture of silence. Also, in countries where people are classified by caste and class, and the voices of those of a lower rank would not be heard, the desire for change comes out even more. The communities engaged in the synodal process have relaunched their request for parrhesia in communion and transparency in communication” (Asia).

“In the church we suffer a lot because we are not listened to. The Church should make more progress on the path of listening and of tolerant dialogue for a synodal Church” (Middle East). “Our priests must also realize that they cannot know everything, that we lay people also have professional experience in our fields that could be valuable for the communities and for the local Church” (Africa).

“That every decision comes about through a more participatory process, from the grassroots. The responsibility of each of us becomes fundamental. Avoid the centralization of tasks/roles among a few people; practice more frequent alternating and encourage people to be more available” (South Cone).

Furthermore, from the responses of the Focolare communities around the world emerges a clear appeal to personal responsibility in the life of the community, and the need to find ways to exercise authority and leadership in a participatory context.

Changing the way we look at young people; enter into relationship with them

The responses from young people, although few in number, were significant.

“Young people very often perceive the Church and the Movement as being entrenched [in their ways] and far from the people. [They seem to] have lost the settings in which to build [the Church and the Movement] together, and where the essence of the Gospel message resides: (the communion of goods, putting the other before everything, giving one’s life for the others, etc.). In local situations, on the other hand, they recognize that the Church is still the one that is out on the streets, in poor neighborhoods, taking an interest in people, and they are the people who listen to us and appreciate us” (South Cone).

The need to facilitate the active participation of young people was underlined. *“Focus on the formation of families to form new generations and improve the formation of priests in seminaries” (Italy).*

“Trust the new generations with their innovative ideas. Young people find it difficult to get involved in meetings that are not only for them. There is a constant need for dialogue with young people with whom we perceive that listening is understood more freely” (Western Europe).

“Pay more attention to intergenerational interaction and support for young people” (North America).

“As young people, what things do we think need to change in the community? The attitude! There has to always be open listening, leaving room for others in spite of their opinions. We believe that parrhesia is fundamental, to tell the truth about what we think with complete trust. Instead, what should be maintained? Experience, because experience strengthens trust among us without feeling judged; the Word is incarnated in daily life and is not something theoretical. We all feel like brothers and sisters, learning from each other, and we see that we all do our part in building the community” (young people from Western Europe).

“To be more open to spaces of prayer. Be understanding and open to suggestions or feedback from people of other faiths. Accept what they offer/share and do not turn against them or think they are bad. As a Church we have become too ritualistic and closed. We should be more open and welcoming” (young people from India).

“A common wish is ‘not to put up fences.’ It is a thought addressed to the Church, but also to the reality of the ‘Little Town’ and the Movement” (young people from the “Little Town” of Montet – Switzerland).

Important points that call for the Church’s further discernment

Some contributions underline further steps that, as an ecclesial community, we should take: *“Greater humility on the part of the Catholic Church is needed. It is hard for someone to say to you: how do you see me? What do I need to improve? It is a step that we should take” (Brazil).*

“Value the role of women. Clarify situations of abuse. Take the Bible as the foundation of everything. Understand the Church also in its great cultural variety (do not

give unequivocal rules)" (Germany, Austria, Switzerland).

"Many people are scandalized when they see that the Church spends so much money on things that seem unnecessary for the people (statues, huge buildings)" (East Africa).

Church structures

"We believe that many would be interested in 'traveling' with us if they felt more welcomed and accepted as they are. The Movement and the Church have already taken some steps in the past, but there is still suffering, the suffering of being judged, of not having a structure that welcomes them... We have tended to concentrate our energies on maintaining our buildings" (North America).

"We should not be attached to fixed ideas as much as to meaningful experiences. Many times, we have pre-established ideas (in the Movement and in the Church) about what a meeting or a retreat is, and we believe that these 'forms' guarantee the 'spirit' because we that's how we experienced it in the past" (South Cone).

We thank the Father of all for the experience we have had these past months and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten His Church according to the presence of Jesus who is walking among us to respond to the deepest needs of the women and men of our time.

Rocca di Papa, July 14, 2022

Synodal Team of the Focolare Movement

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Appendix

Info Sheet: THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

The Focolare Movement (Work of Mary) is an association of pontifical right whose specific purpose is to contribute to the realization of the words of Jesus: *“that all may be one”* (Jn 17:21), that is, to nourish the spirit of brotherhood among peoples throughout the world. CHECK STATUTES

Founded by Chiara Lubich (1920 - 2008) when, during of the Second World War, in her early twenties, she consecrated herself to God. Soon many others followed her, and the first community was formed made up of consecrated people, whether celibate or married persons, and by those who, according to their state, shared its spirit.

As time went by, people of every culture, vocation, social category, ethnicity, and religion joined the Movement. They were mostly lay people (adults, families, young people, teenagers, children), but also men and women religious and ordained ministers.

In order to reach an ever-wider unity of the human family, the Focolares are open to dialogue with people and organizations:

- working for ever greater unity within the Catholic Church;
- establishing relationships of fellowship and engaging in visible gestures of unity between Christians of different Churches;
- continually seeking to bring about fraternal meetings, through the common commitment to live the so-called Golden Rule, present in almost all the sacred texts of the main religions: *“Do to others as you would have them do to you;”*
- collaborating with people without religious beliefs on the basis of shared values oriented towards the common good;
- committing to creating opportunities for meetings and dialogue in the various spheres of culture and of civil, political, and social life.

Spirituality: The rediscovery of God as love is the first pillar of the ‘spirituality of unity,’ also called ‘spirituality of communion,’ based on the practice of *“Mutual and constant love, which makes unity possible and brings the presence of Jesus among all”* (cf. General Statutes of the Focolare Movement). Its evangelical roots give rise to a lifestyle that contributes to fostering justice, peace, and unity in the world.

Outreach: The Movement is present in 182 countries, with permanent centers in 87 countries. It has approximately 110,000 members and two million adherents. Through initiatives and social projects, it reaches another million people regularly. [In addition to Roman Catholics] about 15,000 Christians from 350 Churches and ecclesial communities are part of the Movement. There are more than 12,000 believers of

different religions and about 1,000 people of non-religious beliefs who share its spirituality and aims in various ways.

Presidency: The Movement has a female President, assisted by a co-president and a General Council made up of 64 councilors, all with a five-year mandate. The current president of the Focolare is Margaret Karram, an Israeli citizen of Palestinian origin and the co-president is Jesús Morán from Spain.