

Word of Life Resources

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Workbook for Word of Life Meetings



focolare
m o v e m e n t

Dear community leaders,

This month's booklet begins with an excerpt from Chiara's reflection on Genfest and World Youth Day 2000, in which she underscores the abundance of fruits generated by the proclamation of the Good News at these two gatherings. Chiara says in this reflection that we speak many times and the fruits are abundant, but this is not enough, because we must always announce, but to announce is not only to catechize but, above all, to speak of Jesus starting from our experience and, like the first focolarini, with our hearts overflowing with the love of God.

The psalmist, in saying: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want", not only expresses his trust in him and his happiness at knowing that he is protected, but also wants to encourage others to trust in him through his experience.

In the same perspective, the Pope, in the excerpt published in **NEWS**, exhorts us to speak joyfully of Jesus because faith is a wonderful story of love that certainly entails sacrifice, but those who bear witness to it show the beauty of the goal rather than the fatigue of the journey. We hope that this announcement will be the one that young people will celebrate this month in the Genfest of Aparecida with the slogan: "Together to care" that gathers them. In **NEWS** you can also read a little more about this meeting. At the end, an experience of this encounter with Jesus may serve as an example of the fruits resulting from this meeting.

With you this month, we also want to sing in chorus that the Lord, Jesus, is our Shepherd and we lack nothing, and so cultivate living Christian communities in our areas.

Assuring you of our unity, we send you our warmest greetings.

The Team of the Word of Life Workbook

Announcing the good news

We publish the second part of Chiara Lubich's reflection, which she made in August 2000, on her return from Genfest and WYD in Rome.

We speak often in our various meetings, and we know that there are abundant fruits.

But is this enough?

No, no, after ensuring ourselves of the presence of Jesus in our midst through mutual love, after having directed our love towards everyone, also concretely; we are obliged to do something more.

We must announce, we must always announce, also because we are authorized to do so by the fact that we precede our words with all our love. We must announce, which for us does not mean that we begin by catechizing our neighbors, but starting from our own experience with Jesus, by speaking of him.

And it is precisely this announcement which I feel is a little weak, lacking.

We are well aware and, in part, share the objection that is raised every now and then: 'There isn't time for personal contacts, because of hours and hours of work; because of the many commitments we already have in the Movement.'

In any case, I think that we can still do something more, and not only for those brothers and sisters who are entrusted to us, but for all those we meet.

The Gospel we had rediscovered overflowed into many others because the hearts of the first men and women focolarini were abounding with love for God! This also happens today in certain difficult zones. It's surprising and it makes us give glory to God for the miraculous – so it seems – expansion of our revolution in these areas.

Well then, what can we do so that today, too, it will be like this everywhere?

After having loved them, to which neighbors should we open our hearts and how?

To everyone, to everyone. Even though we can't always speak with words, we can always speak with our heart, by calling them by name, for example, by greeting them in a way that makes them realize that they are important to us, that they are not indifferent to us, that there is a bond with them expressed perhaps only by respectful silence.

These unspoken words – like a smile, for example – if well-chosen, cannot help but open hearts.

And as soon as there is a way in our relations with anyone, we should not wait. We should speak, even a few words ... but speak. In the future we might be able to say more. In the meantime, we've begun.

Let's try to fill our day with these words, with new gestures we never made before, expressions of a more radical and total love.

This is the commitment we want to take from now on and for all of September: words, words, words, spoken or unspoken, but in any case, words.

Published in: Lubich, Chiara. "2022." *Conference Calls*, New City, UK, pp. 548-549.

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The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (Ps 23[22]:1)

Psalm 23 is one of the best known and most loved psalms. It is both a canticle of trust and a joyful profession of faith expressed by someone who belongs to the people of Israel. Through the prophets, the Lord has promised to be their shepherd. The psalmist expresses his personal happiness because he knows that he is protected in the Temple, a place of refuge and grace¹, but also, drawing on his experience, he wants to encourage others to have confidence in the presence of the Lord.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

The image of the shepherd and the flock is very dear to all biblical literature. To understand it fully, we must think of the arid and rocky deserts in the Middle East. The shepherd gently guides his flock, for without him they could go astray and die. The sheep must learn to rely on him, listening to his voice. He is their constant companion.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

This psalm invites us to strengthen our intimate relationship with God by experiencing his love. Some may wonder why the author goes so far as to say that 'I lack nothing'? Nowadays the problems and challenges of health, family, work, etc. are part of everyday life. In addition, there is the immense suffering experienced by so many of our brothers and sisters due to war, the consequences of climate change, migration, violence, etc.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Perhaps the key to interpretation lies in the verse where we read "for you are with me" (Ps 23:4). It refers to certainty in the love of a God who always accompanies us and makes us live in a different way. Chiara Lubich wrote: "It is one thing to know that we can have recourse to a Being who exists, who has mercy on us, who has paid for our sins, and quite another to live and feel ourselves at the center of God's predilection, with the consequent banishment of all the fears that hold us back, of all loneliness, of all sense of orphanhood and all uncertainty... Men and women can know they are loved and believe in

this love with all their being. They can surrender to it trustingly and follow it. Everything that happens in life, whether sad or joyful, is enlightened by knowing love has willed or permitted it all.”

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Jesus brought this prophecy to fulfilment: in John’s Gospel he does not hesitate to call himself the ‘good shepherd’. Relationships with this shepherd are personal and intimate in nature. “I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (Jn. 10:14-15). He leads them to the pastures of his Word that is life, particularly the Word that contains the message enclosed in the “new commandment”, which, if lived, makes “visible” the presence of the Risen One in the community gathered in his name, in his love.ⁱⁱ

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes and the Word of Life Team

ⁱCf Ps. 23:6

ⁱⁱCF. Matt. 18:20

Points to reflect on and Points for dialogue

- The author proclaims his personal happiness at knowing that he is protected in the Temple, a place of refuge and grace. But, in the same way, with his experience he wants to encourage others to trust in the presence of the Lord.
- The image of the shepherd and the flock is very dear to all biblical literature. To understand it well, we have to move mentally to the arid and rocky deserts of the East.
- This psalm invites us to strengthen our intimate relationship with God and to experience his love.
- Perhaps the key to the reading is in the verse that says "because you go with me" (Ps 23:4). It is about the certainty of the love of a God who always accompanies us and leads us to live our existence in a different way.
- He leads them to the pastures of his Word, which is life; in particular the Word that contains the message expressed in the "New Commandment", which, if lived, makes "visible" the presence of the Risen One in the community gathered in his name, in his love.

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- This month of July, the Word of Life has chosen one of the best-known beloved psalms. What is it and what is it about?
- Who does the Shepherd lead and what should his sheep learn?
- Because of our daily experience, never free of problems and challenges, of the suffering of so many brothers and sisters because of war, climate change, migrations, violence; there will be among us those who ask themselves, how is it possible that the author of this psalm can say, I lack nothing? Can you share with us your feelings?
- To what does Chiara Lubich motivate us in this Word of life?
- Who fulfilled this beautiful prophecy and in which Gospel did he call himself the Good Shepherd?

Pope at Audience: Every day is a time of grace

During his General Audience, Pope Francis continues his cycle of catechesis on apostolic zeal, and tells the faithful that "each day is a time of grace" and "new opportunity" for those who follow Christ.

By Deborah Castellano Lubov

For Christ's followers, every day is a 'time of grace' and new opportunity.

Pope Francis gave this encouragement during his Wednesday General Audience in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, as he continued his cycle of catechesis on apostolic zeal.

This week, the Holy Father explored how Jesus himself chose to present His message.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, at the very beginning of his public ministry, the Pope recalled, the Lord revealed that, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, He came to proclaim Good News to the poor and a year of favor from the Lord.

The Pope said Jesus communicated with certain essential elements, especially joy, freedom, light, healing and awe.

"One cannot speak of Jesus without joy, because faith is a wonderful love story to be shared..."

Gospel can only be conveyed joyfully

To witness to Jesus, to do something for others in His name, the Pope recalled, witnesses such a beautiful gift "that no words are sufficient to express it."

Instead, when joy is lacking, the Pope warned, the Gospel is not transmitted to others, the Good News, by its very nature, is "a proclamation of joy."

"A sad Christian can speak of beautiful things, but it is all in vain if the proclamation he conveys is not joyful," he said.

Contagious joy, a new life

"The Gospel of Jesus Christ is, as the prophet foretold, a saving message that brings contagious joy, authentic freedom, the promise of spiritual rebirth as God's beloved sons and daughters, and definitive healing from the oppression of sin and death."

We who have put our faith in Jesus and experienced the transformative power of His word, the Pope suggested, are called "not only to give thanks for this wondrous gift," but also "to share it freely and joyfully with others."

"For Christ's followers," the Pope insisted, "every day is thus a 'time of grace' and a new opportunity" to bear witness to the Good News of God's mercy, forgiveness, and new life in Jesus.

God forgets everything when we ask forgiveness

The Holy Father underscored how "God forgets everything" when we approach Him asking forgiveness.

"He pardons everything," the Pope stressed.

"How great is our God!"

God is the master of the surprises, the Pope said, noting He is always waiting for us.

The Lord waits for us

To welcome the Lord, we need to make ourselves poor interiorly.

Pope Francis concluding by urging faithful to turn to Jesus, admitting we are not self-sufficient.

If we humbly express that we need Him, He will be there accompanying us, the Pope suggested.

Appeals

The Holy Father also made another appeal for war-torn Ukraine, saying for the faithful to pray for the country, each and every day.

Pope Francis also remembered that later this week International Holocaust Remembrance Day will be observed, and recalled those suffering globally with [Hansen's Disease](#).

Originally published: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-01/pope-francis-at-general-audience-apostolic-zeal-is-key.html>

Together to care

The next Genfest will be held this July and for the first time in Aparecida, São Paulo, Brazil. With new objectives, its own motto and various proposals, this event is a milestone on the road to building a more united world.

Young people from all over the world are working on the preparation of this special moment, the Genfest 2024, an opportunity of meeting, of dialogue, of "fire", of Unity, and, especially this time, of care. But what is Genfest? It is an international meeting where thousands of young people between 18 and 35 years of age, from different cultures and religions, come together, driven by the idea of building a more united and fraternal world. It is held every six years and this year, for the first time, it will take place in Aparecida. As a proposal for this edition, the event seeks to be an immersive and practical way to know and deepen the culture of peace, fraternity, solidarity, develop skills and attitudes of empathy, active listening, teamwork, networking, social responsibility, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and knowledge of Brazilian and Latin American cultures and traditions.

By Ana Tano (Argentina), extracted from Ciudad Nueva del Cono Sur magazine.

To learn more:

Gen fest official site: <https://genfest.org/en/home-en/>

Margaret Karram (President of the Focolare Movement): Genfest, an opportunity to be seized. <https://www.focolare.org/en/2024/04/06/margaret-karram-genfest-grasp-the-opportunity/>

On YouTube: <https://youtu.be/gUu-28LYb8?si=-ASON2iSqWPu6TQc>

Lost "in the world", but then found God

At the "welcome feast" to the hundreds of thousands of young people who set the streets of Lisbon ablaze with love and faith, Pope Francis reminded them all: "None of us are Christians by chance. We were all called by name!" because "we are loved. How beautiful!". This undoubtedly touched many hearts, including those of the three young people who offered their testimony at the Stations of the Cross. Here we publish the testimony of Esther Ramiro:

"I grew up far from the Church despite being baptized and having made Communion. And as I grew up, I got lost in the world. When I was just over 18 years old, I was living as if I was married without being married and I had a very dependent relationship that went from bad to worse. At the age of 24, after I finished studying architecture, I had an accident that injured my spinal cord and I started living in a wheelchair," said Esther, a 34-year-old Spaniard who shared her experience before and after meeting God, whom she affectionately calls "Father in Heaven". Being in a wheelchair was a complex experience, which took her out of the environment she was in and changed her outlook on her own life, making her realize that she was not doing well, that perhaps she was missing out on the best.

"I was worrying a lot about the future, trying to run away from suffering. And I was trying to do it all alone. And I didn't know my Father in Heaven, and I wouldn't meet Him until years later." Little by little she got better, took up sports, found a dream job and met Nacho, her "best gift", who would later become her husband. Because they believed the things the world was telling them and found themselves pregnant, they decided to have an abortion, something that simply devastated her. "After that, I was very sad and didn't see any sense in anything. I had never felt so empty. Something had died inside me," she confesses, full of pain.

The encounter with God.

"But the Lord, in his infinite mercy, went out in search of me. A few months later I felt a love so great, so great and so inexplicable, that it began to awaken my conscience. And I went to confession, for the first time in my life, with a deep repentance for so much that I had made this Father, who loved me so much, suffer." After returning to the Church, God granted her a new pregnancy, which this time she welcomed, the fruit of which was born her "precious Elizabeth", whom she loves "madly".

"New problems also arose. I was changing and Nacho did not understand anything. I got to know the COF (Family Orientation Centers) where they help you with difficulties. There they helped us to improve our communication. Nacho was encouraged to go on a

Experiences

retreat and when he came back, our relationship improved even more". With all that experience of renewed faith and love, with a more solid foundation, they finally decided to get married in the Church to receive God's blessing. That, a "wonderful" day, happened on May 7, 2022, "knowing that the Lord will be with us every day to teach us to love each other."

By Walter Sánchez Silva. www.aciprensa.com. August 4, 2023 / 01:29 PM