

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,

The biblical quotation chosen for this month is, in itself, one that encourages us to live the Word. In it the Apostle James invites us to “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers”. For this reason, it is important to keep this exhortation in mind in all Word of Life meetings, and not only in this month’s meetings.

Speaking of this phrase, Patrizia Mazzola underlines what the Apostle James adds: “doers who act, will be blessed in their doing.” This was the experience of Chiara Lubich with her companions when – in the excerpt published in the **In-depth** section – in the hardships of war and even close to death, a smile emerged on her lips.

“Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel,” reads the excerpt from Pope Paul VI published in the **News** section. And our way of evangelizing, following Chiara's way, is to live the Word. This is what Patricia Mazzola affirms in her commentary when she writes: “Chiara Lubich would choose a sentence from the Scriptures and comment on it. She and her friends would then meet together and share the fruits that the Word had generated in their lives. In this way, a community was created around them. It united people and gave witness to the impact they could have on society when they lived the Gospel together.”

The experiences published in this booklet: the first, of a Word of Life parish group, and the second, of a home for the elderly in the Peruvian Amazon, continue to ratify this today. With you, as we seek to bring the Word to life today, we greet you affectionately and wish you a happy month full of Gospel life.

The Word of Life Workbook Team

The essential core of the proclamation: God is Love

“We have become newly aware that evangelizing for us means, first of all: to live, to be, to witness, but also to speak, to proclaim. Several circumstances allow Chiara Lubich to focus on the essential nucleus of our proclamation: God is Love. This is the great discovery that she personally made in the midst of the world war and that she immediately announced to everyone: to her friends, parents, relatives, men and women of the most varied cultures and social conditions. “God loves us immensely.” And it elicited a response: “...and we have believed in Love.”

I remember an important episode. I was still teaching at the time when a priest who was passing through - I had great respect for priests - and who was perhaps aware of my religious tendency, knocked on the door of my classroom and asked to have a word with me. He asked me to offer an hour of my day for his intentions. I answered, “Why not the whole day?” Struck by this youthful generosity, he told me to kneel down, blessed me and told me: “Remember that God loves you immensely.”

From that moment on, I discovered God present everywhere with his love: in my daily life, in my initiatives, in my resolutions, in joyful and comforting events, as well as in sad and even difficult situations. He is always there, He is everywhere and He explains to me. What does He explain to me? That everything is love: what I am and what happens to me; what we are and what concerns us; that I am His daughter and He is my Father; that nothing escapes His love, not even the mistakes I make because He allows them; that his love involves Christians like me, the Church, the world, the universe. And he sustains me and opens my eyes, making me see everything and everyone as many fruits of his love.

The conversion had taken place. The novelty of it all flashed before my mind. I know who God is! God is Love. We became conscious of this, we were convinced of it in the very depths of our being. Our whole life changed completely. A smile continually emerged on our lips, even in the midst of the hardships of war and the separation from all we loved, even with the bombardments and being close to death. Everything was an expression of God's love.

How different our existence was after that! Heaven and earth met. We had been like orphans before, deprived of the sun. How much the religion we thought we were living actually kept us from flying up towards heaven! We had been like little birds, tied down to the earth, perhaps by very fine threads. Instead, now everything made sense.

Excerpted from Chiara Lubich to Bishops-Friends of the Focolare Movement:
Rocca di Papa, February 13, 1979

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” (Jas 1:22)

Listening to the Word, and acting on it, is a fundamental theme that James insists on in his writings. In fact, he continues by saying, “Those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere [in living it], being not hearers who forget, but doers who act, will be blessed in their doing.”¹ And it is precisely this commitment to understand the Word of God and live it that sets us free and gives us joy.

It could be said that this verse from the Bible is the very reason that the practice of living the Word of Life has spread all over the world. Once a week, and then once a month, at the very beginning of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich would choose a sentence from the Scriptures and comment on it. She and her friends would then meet together and share the fruits that the Word had generated in their lives. In this way, a community was created around them. It united people and gave witness to the impact they could have on society when they lived the Gospel together.

As stated by Father Fabio Ciardi: “Even in its simplicity, this initiative made a remarkable contribution to the rediscovery of the Word of God by Christians in the twentieth century.”² In fact, it conveyed a certain technique for living the Gospel and sharing its effects.

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

The letter of James takes up what Jesus had taught in his desire to help people live and experience the kingdom of heaven among them. Jesus declared blessed those who hear his Word and keep it; he recognized as his mother and brothers those who hear the Word and put it into practice; he uses the comparison of a seed falling on good ground that then produces fruit to describe what happens when the Word is sown in the hearts of people who sincerely welcome it. It produces fruits when they persevere in living it.³

“In each of his Words, Jesus expresses all his love for us,” writes Chiara Lubich. “Let’s allow his Words to live in us; let’s make them our own. If we put them into practice, we will experience the powerful life they release within us and around us. Let’s fall in love with the Gospel to the point that it transforms us and overflows onto others. [...] We will experience first-hand what it means to be liberated from ourselves, from our limitations, from all those things that tie us

down. Moreover, we will see the revolution of love that Jesus—now free to live within us—will set off in the world around us.”⁴

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

How can we put this Word into practice? Let’s look around and do all we can to put ourselves at the service of those in need, with small or large gestures of mutual care, transforming the unjust structures of society, countering violence, fostering acts of peace and reconciliation, and promoting concrete actions to safeguard our planet.

Thus, an authentic revolution will burst forth in our own lives, in our families, in our communities and in our places of work. In fact, love is made concrete in social and political projects that aim at building a better world.

As an example of that, a small Focolare community took the commitment to help the most vulnerable people in Lámud, their city in the Peruvian Amazon, 7,650 feet above sea level. They opened the Chiara Lubich Center for the Elderly which, as they said, “was opened at the height of the recent pandemic. It now houses fifty people who are elderly and were destitute. The house, furniture, dishes and even food came as gifts from the neighboring community. It was a gamble to open this facility, and was not without its difficulties and obstacles, but in March 2022 the Center celebrated its first anniversary, preparing a celebration open to the whole city, attended even by government leaders. The two-day celebration enlisted new volunteers, both adults and children, who want to help take care of these elderly people by expanding their own families to include them.”

Edited by Patrizia Mazzola and the Word of Life Team

1. Jas 1:25.

2. Rev. Fabio Ciardi, OMI, theologian and member of the coordinating body of the Focolare Movement, in an introduction to a book only in Italian, “Words of Life” by Chiara Lubich.

3. See Lk 11:28; Lk 8:21, Lk 8:15.

4. Chiara Lubich, commentary on the Word of Life of September 2006, published in Words of Life, New City, London, 2022.

Points for reflection

- Listening and practice is a fundamental theme on which the author of this month's verse insists. And it is precisely this endeavor to know his words and live them that sets us free and gives us joy.
- The simplicity and initiative of the Foundress of the Focolare Movement contributed greatly to the rediscovery of the Word of God in the Christian world of the 20th century, transmitting a method for living the Gospel and sharing its effects.
- "In each of his Words, Jesus expresses all his love for us," writes Chiara Lubich. Let us incarnate it, let us make it our own, let us experience the great power of life that it develops if we live it, in us and around us.
- To put the word into practice, let us look around us and do everything we can to put ourselves at the service of those in need, with small or large gestures of mutual care, transforming the unjust structures of society, opposing violence, favoring gestures of peace and reconciliation; with more sensitivity and actions in favor of our planet.

Points to reflect on and Points for dialogue

Points for dialogue during the meeting

- What do the verses of James 1:22 and 1:25 tell us about living this Word of Life?
- Regarding the biblical quotation of this month, could it be said that it is in itself the motive for the practice of the Word of Life, which has spread all over the world?
- How often did Chiara Lubich choose a complete phrase from Scripture and comment on it? What happened and what was created?
- What does the letter of James take up, what does it state, what does it recognize and with what does it compare?
- In this Word of Life, to what does Chiara Lubich invite us, from whom will we be free and what will we see bursting forth according to Chiara?
- How can the Word be put into practice?
- Did you like the experience of the center for the elderly in Lámud, a city in the Peruvian Amazon at 2,330 meters above sea level, with the name of the founder of the Movement? Have you participated in experiences of this type? Do you dare to participate in initiatives like these?

To preach Christ to the ends of the earth

Pope Saint Paul VI: "Christ is the one who knows us and who loves us; He is the companion and the friend of our life. He is the man of sorrows and of hope."

"Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 *Cor.* 9:16). I am sent by him, by Christ himself, to do this. I am an apostle, I am a witness. The more distant the goal, the more difficult my mission the more pressing is the love that urges me to it (Cfr. 2 *Cor.* 5:14). I must bear witness to his name: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (*Matt.* 16:16). He reveals the invisible God, he is the firstborn of all creation, the foundation of everything created. He is the Teacher of mankind, and its Redeemer. He was born, he died, and he rose again for us. He is the center of history and of the world; he is the one who knows us and who loves us; he is the companion and the friend of our life. He is the man of sorrows and of hope. It is he who will come and who one day will be our judge and - we hope - the everlasting fulness of our existence, our happiness. I could never finish speaking about him: he is the light and the truth; indeed, he is "the way, the truth and the life" (*Jo.* 14:6). He is the bread and the spring of living water to satisfy our hunger and our thirst. He is our shepherd, our guide, our model, our comfort, our brother. Like us, and more than us, he has been little, poor, humiliated; he has been a worker; he has known misfortune and been patient. For our sake he spoke, worked miracles and founded a new kingdom where the poor are happy, where peace is the principle for living together, where the pure of heart and those who mourn are raised up and comforted, where those who hunger and thirst after justice have their fill, where sinners can be forgiven, where all are brothers.

Jesus Christ: you have heard him spoken of; indeed, the greater part of you are already his: you are Christians. So, to you Christians I repeat his name, to everyone I proclaim him: Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega; he is the king of the new world; he is the secret of history; he is the key to our destiny. He is the mediator, the bridge, between heaven and earth. He is more perfectly than anyone else the Son of Man, because he is the Son of God, eternal and infinite. He is the son of Mary, blessed among all women, his mother according to the flesh, and our mother through the sharing in the Spirit of his Mystical Body.

Jesus Christ is our constant preaching; it is his name that we proclaim to the ends of the earth (Cfr. *Rom.* 10:18) and throughout all ages (*Rom.* 9:5).

MASS AT THE "QUEZON CIRCLE" HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
Manila, Philippines, Sunday, 29 November 1970.

Originally published here: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19701129.html

Experiences

Genfest 2024: Together to Care

Genfest is a festival of the youth sector of the Focolare Movement that brings together people from all over the world, of various religious convictions, ethnicities and different cultures. Its title was: "Together to care". The event is held every 6 years at the international level, and this year, for the first time, the Genfest was held in Brazil, between July 19 and 24, in Aparecida. Here we report the conclusion of Margaret Karram, President of the Focolare.



Margaret Karram at Genfest 2024

The whole Genfest experience is tangible testimony that you young people believe, indeed, you are already working to build a united world. These have been days of extraordinary graces for all of us: we have put "care" into practice in different ways:

Experiences

Someone told me about the creativity that each “community” has developed and about the interesting workshops you have spoken about before. These days we have walked together, in a style that Pope Francis would define 'synodal' and not only among you young people, but also with adults; with people from other Movements and communities; with people from different Churches and Religions and with people who do not identify with a religious creed. This network has greatly enriched the Genfest!



In these days you have made the experience of living “community” in “unity”, in unity; a reality that will continue: this will be your arena in which you will learn and train to live fraternity. When I was your age, I was very impressed by an invitation that Chiara made to all of us. She said: “If we are one, many will be one and the world will one day be able to live in unity. And then? Constitute cells of unity everywhere” - perhaps Chiara, if she were alive today, would have called these cells of unity United World Communities.

Experiences

That is why I would like to ask you now for something important: please, do not miss this opportunity, this unique occasion that we have experienced here: God has called the heart of each one of us and is now calling all of us to be protagonists and bearers of unity in the different areas in which you are engaged. Of course, as you heard before, it will not be all easy and we really cannot delude ourselves into thinking that difficulties will not come... but in this Genfest, you yourselves have announced: "a different God, abandoned on the cross".



You have said: "abandoned on the cross all divine and all human, who asks questions without answers" and therefore, a God close to all of us. Embracing every pain, our own or that of others, is how we will find the strength to continue on this path.

Genfest – Aparecida 2024

Margaret Karram

Why announce the Gospel?

T. had a failed marriage and had been living with F. for some years; she had received a Christian formation and now felt distant from God and rejected by the Church. One day I saw her arrive at the parish. I approached her and greeted her warmly. She felt welcomed and opened her heart to me, communicating her pain. I told her with conviction: "God loves you immensely." Later, she confessed to me that it was the first time she had heard that phrase. For her, it was a light. She began to attend the Word of Life meetings in the parish, she made an effort to live the Gospel and began to make it a daily experience.

And, like her, many are won over by the cordial welcome found in the parish and by the atmosphere of charity that permeates the community. It is our constant tension: to make the parish the home of all, without anyone feeling excluded. It is very nice to see that even those who cannot receive the Sacraments are welcomed. We explain to them that they can still live the Word of God, love their neighbor, share joys and sorrows knowing that Jesus said: "Whatever you do to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25-40).

P. Carlos, Argentina

A generous sum

Unexpected gifts received by those who, every day, care for the most fragile in a small town in the Peruvian Amazon.

"We have money until the end of the month." With this message, Javier Varela shares the monthly report with friends of the Hogar, the "Chiara Lubich Home for the Elderly," located in Lámud in the Peruvian Amazon, where he is in charge of administration and his wife Jenny coordinates direct care for the elderly. The message, as one can easily guess, is troubling because the nursing home has no one to fund it; it is running and sustained only by God's providence manifested through many friendly hands and hearts. But Jenny and Javier's faith is disarming and contagious.

Soon after, Javier shares another message: "Rafael, one of the grandparents present at the Hogar, is not well. He has been intubated with oxygen. Jenny is on her way to Chachapoyas, (capital of the Amazon region 36 km from Lámud where the Hogar is located) To get him urgently to the hospital. Hopefully they won't have to stay overnight, it would also be very challenging for Jenny's health. God will provide!" Meanwhile, Jenny signs the authorization for Rafael to be taken immediately to the Lámud Health Center (so that they can administer oxygen to him).

Experiences

“I was left alone in the kitchen, pondering how to proceed – Jenny says – I noticed that tears were beginning to flow down my cheeks. I said to Jesus, ‘What do you want from me? Help me and suggest to me what I should do’. It is powerful to know that Jesus hears your miseries, your struggles, and that in Him you can abandon all worries. All the while, my cell phone had been ringing, ringing... I would have been asked to go and sign the declaration to become his guardian, which I would have liked to avoid. As I walked to the Health Center, a nurse called me to tell me that they had already contacted Rafael’s relative and that he was waiting for him at the hospital in Chachapoyas. I felt great relief, although at no time did I hesitate to accept God’s will, whatever it was.”

Shortly after, all was resolved: Rafael was gradually stabilized and Jenny was able to accompany him to the hospital in Chachapoyas, where she met the elderly man’s grandson, to whom she handed over his papers and a bag of clothes. Jenny is thus able to return home “tired, but calm and grateful for all that had been experienced...”. But it doesn’t end there: while they were taking care of Rafael’s health and the other elderly people in the Hogar House, God took care of them, sending the Providence they so desperately needed. “Someone very dear to me – Javier narrates – told us that the financial aid request we had made together two months earlier had been accepted. It was wonderful to meet this person; I saw in him a true brother. He showed me the letter from the institution we had approached asking for help and the generous amount they sent us”. Jenny and Javier decided to share some of what they had received with the sisters of the Chachapoyas nursing home.

Gustavo E. Clariá

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