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Audience with members of the Focolare Movement

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Focolare Movement, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet Cardinal Farrell, your president Dr. Margaret Karram, the co-president Jesús Morán, the members of the General Council, the delegates of the geographical areas, and all of you. I am grateful that you came while celebrating the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Focolare Movement, also known as the *Opera di Maria*. Thank you!

It coincides with the day on which the Servant of God Chiara Lubich decided to consecrate herself fully to the Lord. From an inspiration she received in an entirely ordinary context of life - while she was going shopping for her family - a radical act of self-giving to God arose, as a response to her call that she had felt, sweet and strong, in her heart. It was 7 December 1943, in Trent, at the height of the war; on the very eve of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Mary's "yes" became Chiara's "yes", generating a wave of spirituality that spread throughout the world, to tell everyone that it is beautiful to live the Gospel with one simple word: unity. But unity also means harmony: harmonic unity.

In these eighty years, you have made this message resound amid the young, communities, families, persons of consecrated life, priests and bishops; and also in various social environments: from the world of school to that of the economy, from the world of art and culture to that of information and the media; and in particular, in the spheres of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. You have thus been an active instrument of a great flowering of works, of initiatives, of projects and above all of "rebirths", of conversions, of vocations, of lives given to Christ

and to our brothers and sisters. For all this today we want to give thanks to God.

In February 2021, speaking at your General Assembly, I emphasized three important attitudes for your progress: living your charism with *dynamic fidelity*, welcoming moments of *crisis as opportunities to mature*, embodying spirituality with *consistency and realism* (Address, 6 February 2021). Living spirituality. I want to remember these today to encourage you to live them and promote them along three lines: *ecclesial maturity*, *fidelity to the charism*, and *commitment to peace*.

Ecclesial maturity. I invite you to work so that the dream of a *fully synodal and missionary Church* may be increasingly realized. Start out from your communities, fostering in them a style of participation and co-responsibility, also at the level of governance. Let the “*focolari*”, the hearths, increase within them and spread around them a climate of mutual listening and family warmth, in which we respect and care for one another, with particular attention to those who are weaker and those most in need of support. To this end, it will be helpful for you to pursue avenues of mutual participation and consultation at all levels, paying special attention to communication and sincere dialogue.

With regard to the second line, *fidelity to the charism*, I remind you of some of your Founder’s words: “Leave to those who follow you only the Gospel. If you do this, the ideal of unity will remain [...]. What remains and will always remain is the Gospel, which does not suffer the wear of time” (C. Lubich, in *La Parola di Dio*, Rome 2011, 112-113). Please, sow unity by bringing the Gospel, without ever losing sight of the work of incarnation that God continues to wish to accomplish in us and around us through his Spirit, so that Jesus may be good news for everyone, no one excluded, and “that all may be one” (*Jn 17:21*).

And so, we come to the third line, *commitment to peace*, so important today. Indeed, after two millennia of Christianity, the longing for unity continues to assume the form, in many parts of the world, of an agonizing cry that demands a response. Chiara heard this during the tragedy of the Second World War, and decided to give all her life so that the “legacy of Jesus” might be realized. Today, unfortunately, the world is still riven by many conflicts, and continues to need artisans of fraternity and peace between men and between nations. Chiara said, “To be love and to spread it is the general purpose of the *Opera di Maria*” (*Eve of Pentecost*, Saint Peter’s Square, 30 May 1998). Being love and spreading it: this is the main purpose. And we know that only from love is the fruit of peace born. Therefore, I ask you to be witnesses and builders of the peace that Christ achieved with his cross, defeating enmity. Think that, from the end of the Second World War until now, the wars have not ended. And we are unaware of the tragedy of war. I will confide in you, when I went to Redipuglia in 2014 for the centenary of the First World War, and I saw that cemetery, I wept, I wept. So much destruction! And every 2 November I go to celebrate in a cemetery, also last time, the Commonwealth Cemetery, and I see the age of the soldiers_ 22, 24, 18, 30... all shattered lives. Because of war. And war does not end. And in war, everyone loses, everyone. Only the arms manufacturers gain. And if weapons were not made for a year, world hunger could be brought to an end. This is terrible. We must think about this tragedy.

Before concluding, I would like to make one final invitation, appropriate in this time of Advent: that of *vigilance*. The snare of *spiritual worldliness* is always lurking. Therefore, you too need to know how to react decisively, consistently and realistically. Let us remember that inconsistency between what we say we are and what we truly are is the worst anti-witness. Inconsistency. Please, take care. And the remedy is always to return to the Gospel, the root of our faith and our history: the Gospel of humility, of selfless service, of simplicity. And I always like to remember that you are very close to the secret of God, the four secrets of God. God does not understand four things: he does not know how many congregations of religious sisters there are; what Jesuits think; how much money Salesians have; and what the *Focolarini* laugh about!

Dear brothers and sisters, as we have already recalled, you are the *Opera di Maria*; she has accompanied you throughout these eighty years and you know well that she will never stop doing so. May the Virgin of Nazareth therefore be the source of your consolation and your strength, so that you may be apostles of unity in the service of the Church and of humanity. Thank you for what you are and for what you do! Continue your journey confidently. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

