

PRESENT TO THE NEED OF THE WORLD

THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS
2019

These elections are forcing us to **widen our gaze**, to look beyond the horizon of individual nations, even though the internal circumstances of each EU country call for all our attention and touch the lives of citizens more directly.

In the past there were shared certainties acknowledged by almost everyone. Today that is no longer the case. We are living in **a completely new phase of history**, characterized by an increasingly evident weakening in interest in reality and, in many cases, a paralyzing passivity. Daily experience is marked by recurrent questions: How do we live with those who are different from us? Why have a family or establish lasting relationships? How should we educate our children? What is the sense of working for the common good?

Many are disoriented and wonder how they can overcome the existential uncertainty that kills hope and blocks the capacity for encounter, dialogue, and initiative at all levels.

What is the starting point for beginning again?

There is one fact common to everyone: notwithstanding fear and uncertainty, **the human heart does not surrender** entirely. "We can discover this in the varied efforts—sometimes confused, but no less dramatic and somehow sincere—that contemporary Europeans make to attain that fullness they cannot help but desire" (J. Carrón).

So then, let us look at some of these efforts to find **suggestions** for facing our current situation. Only experiences of change that are underway now can provide indications for the future. Some of these stories are covered more completely in the April issue of **Traces** magazine, which is dedicated to the European elections.

IN ITALY a cultural center organized a series of gatherings about Europe and invited a well-known economist to speak. During dinner, in response to some questions about politics the organizers asked him, he said, "There is no hope. Italians have fallen into an abyss. We're going to fail." It was difficult to have a conversation because he quickly cut off all discussion. Later, however, when the economist saw the hall full of people and found them to be truly interested, that they were asking questions, he became eager to engage in dialogue. At the end of the evening he told the organizers, "Did you see that I wasn't as pessimistic as I had been at dinner?" That audience, so strangely attentive and curious, challenged his granitic certainty.

IN HOLLAND a Muslim woman in search of a school for her daughter who was afflicted with a serious illness and in need of special care, asked to enroll her girl in a newly opened Catholic school. When the headmaster inquired why she was interested in his school, which was small and poorly equipped for needs of this kind, the woman answered, "I understood that here my daughter will be loved." Months later, when the city council debated whether or not to finance the school, the woman was there, with all the other parents, in front of politicians who "had never seen such a mobilization" asking that a school be allowed to exist because it would be a good for everyone.

IN LITHUANIA an NGO began caring for orphans and families at risk in the complex reality of a nation that before entering the EU had employed the Soviet *internat* model of state-run orphanages. Through its work and by dialoguing with politicians, the NGO helped bring about new laws on foster parenting, hosting, and support of families in difficulty. The organization “contributed to changing the mentality,” they say at the Social Services Ministry. The method? “When we encounter people in difficulty, we don’t start from an analysis of problems, but look for what they have that is positive—relationships, abilities, desires. People don’t realize the positive things they have in their lives. If you show these things to them, their attitude changes and they try to start fresh.”

IN SPAIN marked by economic crisis, a group of families in a small community decided to help those whose pay doesn’t stretch to the end of the month by collecting food and bringing it to their homes in pairs. In this way, not only do they deal with a material need, but they also create bonds of affection and friendship among families. The material need, which could become an occasion for violence, instead becomes an opportunity for forming bonds among neighbors. The city government took note of their work and provided them with space to expand their activity.

What did all these people encounter that enabled them to change their attitude about reality, overcoming fears and isolation?

Is it not perhaps true that before finding a solution to the thousands of daily problems, **what we need is something that can change our gaze**, that can make us savor the joy of living, re-awakening our will to act?

Recalling his early years of teaching at the Berchet High School in Milan in the mid-1950s, Fr. Giussani observed, “We did not come into the schools looking to create an alternative plan for them. We came into the schools with the awareness that we carried What makes living human, and What makes seeking truth authentic.”

Our first need is not for the nth political theory or for a new organizational strategy, but to encounter a life that has the power to open us up again to hope, to rekindle our interest in our existence and that of our family, friends, colleagues, and fellow citizens, to the point of allowing next May’s elections to provoke us.

Sharing the anxieties and problems of all, Pope Francis invites us to achieve a “**social friendship**,” one that involves a dialogue and an encounter in which **each person contributes his or her own experience** to shared life.

Therefore, let’s look to the European Union elections as **a great opportunity**, above all for a **verification**, and ask ourselves:

- **How does the experience I am living awaken in me a passion for the common good?**
- **What contribution am I making to the social and political life of the place where I live?**
- **Where do I see the founding values of Europe incarnated and new in shared experiences?**
- **What action does the upcoming election inspire in me, and what initiative is it suggesting to me?**
- **What criteria are guiding me with respect to the substance of the electoral campaign and the electoral choice itself?**