

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
via video connection from Milan, October 20, 2021**

Reference texts: J. Carrón-L. Giussani, *You Are Not Lacking in Any Spiritual Gift*, <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2021/10/08/you-are-not-lacking-in-any-spiritual-gift>, and J. Carrón, *Is There Hope? The Fascination of the Discovery*, chapters 5–6, <https://english.clonline.org/books/books-by-fr-carr%C3%B3n/is-there-hope>

- *L'iniziativa (The initiative)*
- *La prima vez (The first time)*

Good evening everyone! Welcome to our first School of Community meeting with which we start this new year after Beginning Day.

First of all, I would like to deeply thank all those who prayed for me in recent days (as I asked you to do at Beginning Day). The surgery went well, the surgeon was very pleased with the outcome, and in the coming months I will continue with the necessary medical checkups and treatments. Thanks again everyone!

Any situation we live through can become an opportunity to recognize what makes us live. In a conversation yesterday, a friend told me how even a beautiful thing like scientific research—in which she is involved—can become boring and stop being interesting. She realized this because while she was working she found herself looking forward to her coffee break and complaining as soon as someone asked her how she was doing. Why does this happen even when we are doing something we like? While having this conversation with her, it occurred to me that Fr. Giussani identifies the origin of our lack of interest, of our tiredness and our complaints in “a lack of method,” so that “the root from which everything originates, the source of our energy and intelligence, is taken for granted, is no longer nourished, is no longer nurtured, is no longer helped by our attention and our will, and therefore it is as if it slowly tended to vanish, to become abstract.” He concluded this reflection by saying, “In Christian life it is very dangerous to take for granted in any way what is the continuous origin” (Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Audiovisual Documentation, Beginning Day, Milan, September 14, 1975). When we lose the source from which everything that makes life different springs, we are in trouble!

How can we help each other in our daily lives to avoid taking for granted this “continuous origin”? Paradoxically, sometimes we become aware of it again when we come across things that upset us, as one person wrote to me: “At the meeting organized in my parish at the beginning of the catechetical year, no children or parents showed up, without even letting us know that they weren’t coming. And it isn’t that there are no children in our town! In the quiet square in front of the church, the pastor and the three of us who are catechists were looking each other in the face; or rather, they were looking at the ground and I was looking at their glum and speechless faces [this is an example of what we said at the Beginning Day about secularization: the desert spreads]. But the despair I saw on the silent face of the pastor, to whom I have been very attached for years, did not put a dent in my hope at all. I was amazed: What is present in me that changes my judgment on things when everything is marked by sadness and bitterness? What is present in me that overcomes the despair and loneliness that surround us? Fr. Giussani said that “paradoxically, the

moment when the crisis hits bottom is the greatest moment of hope” (L. Giussani-G. Testori, *Il Senso della Nascita* [The sense of birth], Bur, Milan, 2013, p. 154). What a grace to have the opportunity to read this testimony, how comforting, what gratitude I have to be a part of this experience with all my awareness, my wretchedness, my fragility, my weaknesses! How interesting it is to live Christianity in this way and to wish to live it not below this level of awareness, wide open to the world, strong, certain, full of His presence that desires to embrace everyone and reach everyone right where they are.”

Christianity will continue to be interesting to each of us only if we live it at this level of awareness, “certain, full of His presence”; that is, if the continuous origin is not taken for granted.

I was very impressed by two exhibits at the Rimini Meeting (the one on the TV series and the one entitled Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty) and at school I decided to begin from these exhibits in all of my classes, from that sense of void and from that uncertainty that I was living in a new chapter of my life. I started from these wounds that I have experienced and that I live with, caused by a reality that is often not as I wish it to be and by my own shortcomings. What happened surprised me. During a lesson one girl said to me, “I don’t want to begin my life—it’s all my parents’ fault” (just like one of the characters in a TV series says!). Another accused me of being “mean” because she was already thinking about this void every night before going to bed and it was unbearable for her to talk about it in class with a teacher and feel even worse. Another girl, after Instagram and WhatsApp were down for a few hours, confided in me that “I felt lost, I didn’t know how to distract myself anymore.” When I asked my students from what they felt the need to be distracted, many answered, “From life,” or “From reality.” Everything becomes an opportunity to go to the core of what you said to us about the wounds, and everything becomes an opportunity to encounter the other. But what struck me even more was my surprise at the end of the lesson at the fact that what had happened was not mine; that is, it was not the result of my often inadequate and clumsy abilities, but was due to a Presence and a belonging that have provoked in many students a curiosity and a desire to share, during the break or at the end of the lesson, something about themselves and their questions. “Prof, why is it so difficult to get up in the morning knowing that it will be a horrible day?” “Prof, will all the time I am wasting now in school be useful for the future?” “Prof, why do I feel every day that I am a burden on everyone?” “Prof, I don’t go to church anymore because I am angry with God, who did nothing for a sick loved one who died, but I would like to talk about it with you.” The need behind these questions became clear to me when you quoted Fr. Giussani saying, “The world today has returned to the level of poverty of the Gospel; in Jesus’ time the problem was how to succeed in living, not who was right and who was wrong” (You Are Not Lacking in Any Spiritual Gift, p. 6). This beginning was extraordinary, first of all because it allowed me to see the gift I have received from the experience of the movement lived in these thirty years. “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift”: if I look at my past and especially at my present, I can say with absolute certainty that this phrase is true for me, as you said: “But nothing, nothing, can cast doubt on our inexhaustible security in the grace that is given to us and renewed every morning” (ibid., p. 3), despite the fact that every day is surrounded by emptiness and wounds—actually, it comes to us even through this emptiness and these wounds. There is no greater evidence than the fact that in my life everything was generated by my encounter with the charism of Fr. Giussani. Thank you for the journey you have us take together.

I am amazed to recognize and see firsthand in your experience the words of Fr. Giussani on the “lack of method” that I read at the beginning in response to my friend involved in scientific

research. As you say, seeing the gift that one has received; that is, not taking it for granted, makes the beginning “extraordinary.” We don’t depend on an outcome, on the situation of the students and on their reactions, or on our abilities. We are determined only by the origin that is present—all newness comes from it when it is not taken for granted—of which the situation in which we live makes us aware, even a situation like the one you described. If you hadn’t come across your students, you could have continued to take for granted the grace you received. The relationship, even if conflictual, you have with your students has made you recognize, with gratitude, the scope of the grace you have received. And this experience has allowed you to grasp the whole existential truth of Fr. Giussani’s phrase, “We are a spectacle for ourselves, [...] of inexhaustible certainty in the power of grace that is given us and is renewed every morning” (ibid.) that nothing manages to successfully question. There is no greater urgency than this, every morning. It is the awareness of this grace that allows us to get up in the morning in a different way (this is what our students are waiting to see in our faces) from others and to be able to offer—by living it, by wearing it printed on our faces—the grace that makes us different. As you said, “There is no greater evidence than the fact that in my life everything was generated by my encounter with the charism of Fr. Giussani.”

That is why many of you have perceived Taylor’s question—quoted at Beginning Day—as a gift. Has this also happened in the UK?

Yes, here too, amazing! I was very surprised and moved when I realized that the first miracle not to be taken for granted is the fact of being here today, of not having abandoned this story (despite the scandal, the sorrow, and the misunderstanding often experienced, since we still remain people full of limitations), as you have reminded us. I was moved even more in hearing the words of Charles Taylor that you quoted and starting to make them mine. In the last week those words have become like a woodworm that keeps digging into the things I do every day, in my daily life (taking one child to kindergarten, changing the diaper of and breastfeeding my other child, cooking, cleaning the house, grocery shopping, talking to my neighbor, being with my husband and his work-related stress, trying to figure out what to do when I will return to work after my maternity leave). I wonder, Why did I stay? Why do I stay? Why do I drive late on Monday evenings to get to School of Community with so many people with whom I may not be very familiar? Why do I go to Mass in my parish where, having arrived just six months before the pandemic, I still don’t know anyone besides the former pastor, who has just been transferred abroad? I didn’t understand everything that was said on Beginning Day, just as I don’t understand everything that is said in School of Community (and thank goodness, I would say!), but like Peter I can say, “Master, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68). So often there is a correspondence with what I see and feel and a fullness of life that I cannot deny, to the point that, while continuing to make mistakes and forgetting a thousand times, I can say that I am now shaped by this encounter and this history, and for this reason I am grateful to be able to follow and I am certain that it is worthwhile. This evidence that imposes itself before my eyes is also what allows me to get back in the game after eighteen months of lockdown in a country that for many reasons I don’t feel I know enough yet to feel at home, and gives me hope for the future. Once again, thank you for the friendship and fatherhood you show us.

If we pay attention to what happens in our lives (as Fr. Giussani instructed us), how do we overcome what he calls the “lack of method” that makes us take for granted the origin? You spoke of “a woodworm that keeps digging into the things I do [...], I wonder, Why did I stay?” recalling

Taylor's question. And you are surprised—look how we can come to grasp the scope of Fr. Giussani's words!—that “the first miracle not to be taken for granted is the fact of being here today and not having abandoned this story” because “there is a correspondence [...] and a fullness of life that I cannot deny,” so that “I can say that I am now shaped by this encounter [...]. This evidence [...] imposes itself before my eyes.” If this evidence does not impose itself as an existential fact, everything else prevails: all the fatigue, all the difficulties, all the daily troubles.

When it is no longer this evidence that determines my present, not because I deny it—pay attention, she did not say she denied it—but simply because it is taken for granted, what determines our life?

I was very impressed by the question Taylor asked himself about what happened in Quebec in the 1960s. This question came to me forcefully at the beginning of this school year because my most recurrent thought was, “I am still here at school, teaching.” I assure you that among us teachers this thought comes up again and again. There was, and there is, a tiredness, a desire not to be engaged, and very often the temptation is to leave; not to leave school—the place that gives you a salary!—but withdrawing from being engaged, from putting my humanity at stake. But the Lord does not leave me too long immersed in this lack of desire. This is what happened with respect to a student of mine who has difficulty in math. Usually, in the face of poor results from my students, I tend to be quite abrupt, but one day I said to him, “Okay, listen, math is important, but it is not the most important thing in life.” From here the beginning of a dialogue was born. The other day, he stopped me in the hallway and gave me a small gift, saying, “Prof, you talked about it in class and I felt like you would like it, so I went to look for it and I want to give it to you.” It surprised me a lot, and I asked, “How did you know I would like it?” I hadn't told him explicitly that I would. He replied, “Look, Prof, I still don't understand the things you teach, but I listen to you because the last time you listened to me.” Returning home, I wondered what this meant. I remembered your words about significant people, and I thought about how this kid made me thank the Lord for my work, even with all of my limitations. It is a small thing, but it makes me go back to class every day, putting all of myself into play, with my limitations and shortcomings, because if I hadn't been there listening to that kid with all of myself, with all of my poor humanity, I probably would have been left with only the urge to leave, as happened to so many people in the church in Quebec in the 1960s. I remembered the words of Fr. Giussani that you had us listen to again: “When we wake up in the morning, [...] what do we desire? We have to struggle—it's true—to pierce through the whole multitude of desires that instinctively present themselves to our brains, our consciousness, our soul, we have to resist this and penetrate the multitude to get to the bottom of it all, to this desire to remember Him!” (ibid., p. 13). Thank you for everything.

As you can see, in spite of everything that has happened to us, we can start to see prevail “a tiredness, a desire not to be engaged,” and that “very often the temptation is to leave; not leaving school—the place that gives you a salary!—but withdrawing from being engaged, from putting my humanity at stake.” When Fr. Giussani said that the only purpose of the movement was “to put ourselves, our person, into play” (ibid., p. 10); that is, to set the “I” in motion, how right he was! If we are not set in motion, we withdraw from engaging our humanity. At that point the Mystery can use any person—sometimes the least predictable, like a kid who is listless but loyal to the presence in front of him—to call us back, to reawaken us to that self-awareness we need in order to live. How sharp that kid was! “I still don't understand the things you teach, but I listen to you because the last time you listened to me.” This made you return home thanking the Lord for having met him. This is how we can wake up and—if we pay attention—no longer take anything for granted: this “is a small thing, but it makes me go back to class every day putting all of myself into play”;

that is, engaging with your humanity. And this becomes a possibility for your students as well—in fact, the worst thing that could happen to them is that you stop engaging with your own humanity. When you engage with yourself, even someone who has difficulty in math can begin to wake up. Who knows what else you will discover that has begun to stir at the core of that kid’s “I”!

I want to tell you about a little thing that happened to me. After putting the children to bed, in a moment of rare seriousness in front of life, instead of slouching on the couch watching TV, my husband and I decided to read the text of the Beginning Day together. When I started reading aloud the short introduction and the first point, I was moved because I realized that it was describing me at that very moment. In the morning when I return home after taking the children to school, I am always surprised to feel a great nostalgia, which became a concern to me and which I thought was caused my uncertain work situation. I spent the day trying to do useful things for my future, but a sense of emptiness loomed. On that particular evening, my husband came home and as usual we prepared dinner and put the children to bed, nothing extraordinary. And yet something had already happened: as I read the first point, the small gestures of attention and kindness of my husband that night came to my mind—gestures full of esteem and affection that are not related to what I do or don’t do for our family, to what I can or can’t do in my job, gestures that said simply, “I am glad to see you and I want to be with you now.” These gestures had been there in the previous days, but had not moved me because I had taken them for granted without realizing it. I could only become aware of that grace that was and is present when I chose not to take for granted my belonging to the church and the movement, when I read the text of Beginning Day and left the comfort zone not of my thoughts, but the real one, of the couch and the TV! When one realizes that grace is present and was present even before one recognized it, sadness—it is true!—becomes a friend: it enables me to realize that the only thing I need is that grace, that caress. That caress gives meaning to my existence: there is One who wants me here, now. My life, in all its small details, is precious to Him. I am there, I exist ... Thank God. Thanks again and continue the good work.

Without a moment of rare awareness of your humanity and a seriousness with what is human, everything you later discovered would have passed you by unnoticed, my friend. Giving space to what we said to each other at Beginning Day made you discover your husband’s gestures of attention and kindness and made you feel loved (“I am glad to see you and I want to be with you now”). This is what we need: “I could only become aware of that grace [...] when I chose not to take for granted my belonging to the church and the movement.” What scope this discovery has! How does this experience facilitate our understanding of another part of the text of the School of Community; namely, the line from D’Annunzio quoted by Fr. Giussani, which shocked our mentality?

In recent days, I have read and reread the contribution of Fr. Giussani that you proposed to us on Beginning Day. I want to understand more and more what he said to us, so I wanted to ask you some questions. I would like to better understand, for example, the passage that seems to me to exist from love for the other (with a lowercase “o”) to love for the Other (with a capital “O”). Does this passage exist and, in this case, are the two forms of love—so to speak—linked? Do they happen at the same time? Right after, there is another passage that I find difficult to understand

and concerns D'Annunzio's phrase quoted by Fr. Giussani, "I have what I have given" (*ibid.*, p. 11). Listening to it, I instinctively thought that—regardless of D'Annunzio's personality—it was an expression that one should share, that Fr. Giussani quoted it in a positive sense, as an expression of the gift of self, meaning that if I don't give, I have nothing, I don't own anything. In short, a hymn to generosity, an attack on selfishness. Hearing him, instead, harshly criticize these words took me aback and even saddened me. I thought, in fact, that I must still be far from Fr. Giussani's way of judging. I have the impression that his critique is directed at the voluntarism underlying D'Annunzio's words, in which everything seems to be centered on the person's ability and on the effort of his willpower. So, I wanted to ask you for clarification. In particular, I am reminded of the lines from *The Tidings Brought to Mary* that we have often recalled in which Claudel has his characters say, "Is the purpose of life living? It is not a question of living, but of dying [...] and giving what we have joyfully. [...]," and "What is the worth of the world compared to life? And what is the worth of life if not to be given?" (*P. Claudel, The Tidings Brought to Mary*). What is the difference between the "giving" referred to in these sentences and the "giving" referred to by D'Annunzio?

Thank you because you show us what the work of the School of Community we are called to do consists of: a comparison between what we think and what is proposed to us. You thought that what D'Annunzio was saying was right and you were surprised by Fr. Giussani's harsh criticism of it. The people who intervened before you have documented—if we have paid attention—the truth of what Fr. Giussani says about D'Annunzio's line "I have what I have given": "There is nothing more illusory and therefore a more inflated lie than this." Why? Because that statement assumes that I have the energy, the strength, to do something on my own. That's why Fr. Giussani says that the right formulation is, "I have what I have been given!" (*ibid.*) The first "activity," as we have always said in reference to the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, is a "passivity," a receiving. Fr. Giussani repeats this when he speaks of charity: the gift of God is the first initiative. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I had mercy on you" (cf. Jer 31:3). That is why "I am, I consist, I have what I have been given" (*ibid.*) because I am nothing. The first thing to understand is that everything I am has been given to me.

So what is D'Annunzio's mistake, as it is so often ours? To take the origin for granted. "You are incapable," says Fr. Giussani, "of loving someone, [that is, of giving,] of being a friend, if you have not recognized that you have been loved" (*ibid.*). This is the great novelty that Jesus introduced: "You did not love first, I loved you first!" (cf. 1 Jn 4:19) And this precedence is always operative, not just in the beginning. For this reason, Fr. Giussani continues, "to be wanted, to exist means that I am continually wanted [...] therefore I am loved [...] I am called out of nothingness in every moment. The substance of my 'I' is the fact that You want me" (*ibid.*). The more we are aware of this, the more will we be able to give. Our giving only springs from continually receiving. If we don't understand this, we cannot resist for long without depending on some personal profit, on what others give us in return. If we do not start from grace received and given back constantly and free of charge by Christ, we will always, in order to continue to love, have the demand that the other respond, and for this reason sooner or later we will get tired and stop "giving"; then D'Annunzio's phrase will be revealed in all its falsity.

That is why it is interesting to help each other understand what Fr. Giussani tells us; that is, the growth of our self-awareness, of the recognition that my consistency is "that You want me, O God" (*ibid.*), is crucial. This is self-awareness. As we can see, this is far from obvious; in fact, we often

forget about it and, like D'Annunzio, jump in with our actions without realizing it, thinking that we are the origin of everything.

So it is crucial to identify in our experience what reawakens this awareness each time, as one of you writes to me: "As I was rereading some passages from *Beginning Day*, one thing struck me deeply, so I started working on it. What is the most important thing I have? The companionship, women, money, the sunset, my career, everything around me? What is the most important thing I have? Self-awareness, knowing who I am, knowing what I am doing in the world, the purpose I have—this is the most important thing I have, there is no other. If I don't have this, I don't know why I am living. But I alone cannot keep my self-awareness alive; especially in these times I become distracted and over time I forget [this is the problem: that the origin, the purpose, disappears from our consciousness through forgetfulness and distraction]. Thus Jesus created a story, a companionship guided to destiny. And by staying with it, searching, following with my heart, I can go deeper and deeper into the concreteness of the day with this newness," without which there is no freshness in life. This is the awareness that D'Annunzio didn't have but that you have: "I can't do it alone."

We too can think like D'Annunzio if someone doesn't come to our aid.

*The issue of the decree on the movements involving the Fraternity and that related to the Memores Domini in particular, has provoked me deeply and raised the question, How have I lived and how do I live the charism in my daily life? I have rediscovered in myself real responsibility toward the charism, deep gratitude for the One who took hold of me through this particular story. And I have verified that this is the concrete occasion in which Christ meets me again and asks me, Do you love me? A few days ago I was invited to dinner by a young coworker with whom a good relationship of mutual esteem has developed. A while ago she wrote me this text message: "I see you as if in person ... The face of a hard-working person, with an intense and pained gaze, yet infinitely sweet. One of those good people you meet by chance and you want to hug because they smile at you from the bottom of their human experience and suddenly compensate you for the disheartening other half of the world, that of the people trapped in their pool of darkness." In telling her about my vocation (I hadn't told her anything about me yet) I was moved; I told her that the only adequate and true explanation for who I am, the different look she sees in me, is that I was and am continually wanted and loved by Christ in every moment, just the way I am; that on my journey with the movement I am learning to love more and more my humanity and that of others, family and strangers. She was speechless, then said, "In any case, it is clear that you are a balanced woman." I thought of Fr. Giussani who on *Beginning Day* said, "A person loves his own identity by loving an Other ... There may be no one who really sees him, but if he understands all this, he is a free man, a stable man, perhaps with a pained outlook on reality" (ibid.). I also thought of you, who recalled these words of Fr. Giussani: "As we go on maturing we are a spectacle for ourselves, and, God willing, for others too. A spectacle, in other words, of limitation and betrayal and, therefore, of humiliation, and at the same time of inexhaustible certainty in the power of grace that is given us and is renewed every morning. This gives us the naive boldness that characterizes us" (ibid., p. 3). The desire for the memory of Christ in my days is never taken for granted; it is not the result of an effort of my will; it is not simply tied to a rule: I realize that it is given, renewed, in every moment and that my freedom is played well even if it all it does is yield to this desire. Thank you for your fatherhood in this increasingly fascinating journey.*

“The desire for the memory of Christ in my days is never taken for granted.” This is what makes life different—not our successes, not that things go according to what we think. Only the memory of Christ makes us free from everything else and stable. But how do we achieve this self-awareness, so that our lives are free and we do not depend on the crumbs that fall from someone’s table? “The only adequate and true reason that explains who I am [...] is that I am continually wanted and loved by Christ, at every moment, just the way I am.” Self-awareness is gained if we do not take this for granted; otherwise, in the end, it all comes down to voluntarism, as D’Annunzio claims.

But then what do we need so that the memory of Christ never becomes overlooked in our days? What is the purpose of belonging to the movement, to the charism?

The fact that I am not lacking in any spiritual gift is continually placed before me and I am reminded of it, even in a blatant, unpredictable, as well as unexpected way, so that I can become even more aware of the faithful author of these gifts. Two things that happened in the days following Beginning Day made this even more evident. The first: in a message, a former co-worker of mine (I have been retired for ten months) told me that he had been thinking of me. He is organizing a job search for a new position and wrote to me wondering what I would do. He said that my opinion “says a lot,” acknowledging his recognition of a relationship that has been meaningful and good for him, which makes me say to myself: “Truly, when one belongs, it is enough to breathe to be a presence!” In fact, in the few years we worked together, I didn’t do anything other than my job. The second thing that happened: I found out that a shopkeeper we usually go to is very sick with a serious illness that was diagnosed recently. I immediately sent a message to her daughter who works with her. A minute later her daughter called me and thanked me for thinking of her mother and being close to her, but she told me that she had called me first because her mom had—when no one knew about her illness yet—talked to her constantly about how I had looked at her and greeted her that very morning. “As if he had seen everything... And he left full of sorrow,” her daughter said on the phone, adding, “I have always noticed your different, beautiful gaze. But up to this point... I want to thank you very much.” I asked myself, “Why is she calling me even if she didn’t experience that gaze first hand? What reverberation did what the mother recounted have on her daughter? And the mother, what did she see?”

Only when we are reawakened from our torpor, from our distraction (as we are seeing), from our forgetfulness, can we bring the newness that has been given to us even just by breathing—as you said—and by looking at the other because all that we have received is right there. This is what is at play for us in the circumstances we are called to live in and to respond to the request of the church.

First of all, thank you for the paternity you have always shown for each of us. The recent events concerning the Fraternity, and in particular the decree of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, are questioning me about what it means for me to live the experience of the movement and the Fraternity. I have been a member of the Fraternity for over thirty-five years and for me it is truly the grace of God that makes itself present every day. The pope, in his meeting on September 16 with the leaders of the movements, reminded each of us: “As members of associations [...] with devotion you endeavour to live out and make fruitful those charisms that the Holy Spirit, through your founders, granted to all the members of your groups, to the benefit of the Church [...] this Decree urges us to accept some changes and to prepare the future, starting from the present” (Pope

Francis, “Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To The Participants In The Meeting Of Moderators Of Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements And New Communities,” September 16, 2021). *I wondered what it meant to me that the Fraternity should make changes to the Statute. At first I thought of it almost as something that didn’t concern me very much, convinced that you and the Diakonia of the Fraternity would certainly choose for the best. But then I thought more deeply about what the charism is for each of us, as you recently reminded us: “Everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered,” and he bears it for the whole world. Then I was surprised to discover a different attitude within myself. Each of us is a subject, an active “I” in the Fraternity. Thus, the amendment of the Statute concerns me—and very much!—precisely for this reason, which rests on the self-awareness to which you recalled us during Beginning Day. The amendment of the Statute also challenges me and the work that will come from it will be a source of riches for us and for all. For this reason, I hope that the preliminary draft you will prepare can circulate widely in all of our groups of Fraternity, so that each person can make his own contribution. Thank you.*

Thank you for reminding us again how of important it is that we all take more and more seriously the statement that “everyone bears responsibility for the charism he has encountered” (L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generating Traces In The History Of The World*, McGill-Queen’s, 2010, p. 83), as Fr. Giussani told us. As I have already announced, an organic work is underway to adapt the Statute of the Fraternity according to the provisions of the General Decree which came into effect on September 11, 2021. The Diakonia of the Fraternity will discuss a first draft as soon as possible, to be submitted for the evaluation of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. You will be promptly informed of the contents and the first results of this work, so that each of you can exercise, as you have wished for, his responsibility in the Fraternity. This work represents a first phase of the exercise of the responsibility of each member of the Fraternity. In fact, after the Dicastery approves all the required statutory changes, the greatest responsibility to which we will be called—as the decree asks of each member of the Fraternity—will be to recognize whom the Spirit gives us to guide us, according to the method indicated by Fr. Giussani. As we have heard, “You do not choose a teacher: you recognize him!” (*You Are Not Lacking in Any Spiritual Gift*, p. 13) because he or she is given to us by the Holy Spirit. Some suggestions on how to live this responsibility were offered to us by Fr. Giussani in the audio we listened to during the Beginning Day.

Hello. Rereading Fr. Giussani’s words, “The important thing in life is recognizing a master! Because you do not choose a teacher: you recognize him!” and yours, “But how to recognize him or her?” made me want to read again the point in chapter 9 of Generating Traces In The History of The World titled, “A charism in action: responsibility of each one.” Toward the end it says, “This is our virtue: the comparison with the charism in its originality through the fleeting things that God uses. [...] For now, the comparison is with the person with whom everything began. This person can be dissolved, but the texts left behind and the uninterrupted succession—if God wills—of the people indicated as the reference point, as true interpretation of what happened, become the instrument for correction and for reawakening; they become the instrument for morality. The line of references indicated is the most living thing in the present, because a text alone can be interpreted wrongly. It is difficult to interpret it wrongly, but it can happen. [...] If giving one’s life for the work of an Other does not have a precise reference point, then its historicity fades away, its concreteness is lost; you no longer give your life for the work of an Other, but for your

own interpretation of it, for your own personal taste, for your own profit or for your own point of view” (Generating Traces, pp. 84-85). And here is my question: how can recognizing the teacher avoid becoming the result of my own interpretation, as Fr. Giussani warned against? Because it is better for me to look at what the authority is looking at right now than to follow my inspirations, dislikes, or sympathies. Thank you.

What the church is calling us to now is to recognize this reference point of which Fr. Giussani speaks. And the method that Fr. Giussani showed us does not change: “You do not choose a teacher: you recognize him!” (*You Are Not Lacking In Any Spiritual Gift*, p. 13). The alternative—which we must grasp well—is between choice and recognition: if each of us chooses according to what he thinks, according to his own interpretation, or if each of us recognizes the one who in our experience proves to be a help in answering our true need. We have this time at our disposal until there are the elections of the new leaders of the Fraternity (in the manner defined by the new Statute that will be approved by the Dicastery) to practice this recognition, each of us where we are, and if we pay attention to what we experience, we can begin to recognize whom the Holy Spirit is giving us.

At work this week, something happened that allowed me to better understand who the teacher, the authority is. I realized that this is true not only for me, but for people we meet as well. On Monday morning, I greeted a coworker of mine and asked her how the weekend had been and she told me about the difficulty she is having with a loved one. She listed all of this person’s shortcomings, expressing a series of complaints, even understandable ones. I advised her to talk to that person and tell him sincerely about her discomfort, without reprimanding him for everything that was wrong, but trying to provoke him with questions that would bring out what was really close to his heart, such as: But are you happy? Is the kind of relationship you have with me enough? Don’t you want to share what happens to you and not live all of your difficulties and successes by yourself? The next day she thanked me and said, “You have no idea how helpful you were. After talking to him, he started to cry and asked me to help him on his journey. It is no coincidence that I met you at this very difficult time.” I am struck by this when I compare it to what I heard you say at Beginning Day: “So then, what is above all necessary for recognizing this teacher? The awareness of the nature of our true need, a clear self-awareness [...]. There is no other criterion” (ibid., p. 15). This is what happened to my coworker, and it is the same for me, as it was for Fr. Giussani, who said, “God leads me to learn about the things I desire from people who live them, from the people who are already living them” (ibid.). The point then is to be aware of our true need because only in this way can we recognize those presences that give us a jolt for their correspondence to our heart. Thank you very much for the steps of awareness that you help me take because then one can really enjoy everyday life.

God has me learn what I desire not from those I decide to follow, or those I choose, but from those who already live it. It is an acknowledgment we must accept if we do not want to have to decide on our own. It is an obedience to what happens, as you remembered in the words of Fr. Giussani that “God leads me to learn about the things I desire from people who live them, from the people who are already living them,” sometimes in the most unexpected form.

Hello everyone. In August, I started a doctorate abroad. One evening I went to dinner with a family of the movement that lives half an hour by train from me. I had never seen them in my life and we have nothing in common, and yet the evening made me feel at home. We were so attuned that I opened up, telling them about my life, my family and the doubts (about my future, about moving

abroad) that are haunting me, things I haven't even told my dearest friends. On the way home by train, I found myself grateful to have been there (it seems absurd!) and a little less afraid of the future that awaits me, which before that terrified me. I wondered, What happened tonight? How can you be yourself with people you don't know? Where does this being attuned come from? What has changed my position? Was it just a nice evening in the company of nice people? The following weekend I found the answer at Beginning Day, "The charism is the modality with which the Holy Spirit, the energy of the Spirit causes us to glimpse the evidence, that is, the truth of faith and its capacity for transformation. A charism evokes affinity and this affinity is called 'communion.' The reality of this communion that lives is called 'movement.'" (ibid., p. 4). No other explanation could be given for what happened apart from the faith lived in the movement, the only factor I have in common with this family of strangers. An experience like this makes my faith in Jesus Christ reasonable, something I can encounter in the flesh; it guarantees a freedom and unity that is humanly impossible (as with that family, for example) to reproduce and allows for a true experience of peace. Let me say one last thing. This experience is also the criterion according to which I am dealing with the decree on movements. The charism for me is what I experienced that evening, and that's it; this is possible because the movement has reached me (and them) through others who have told me (and them) about it. These others follow the path you point out to us, and for me there is nothing else. The GS kids of the sixties recognized what was happening before their eyes and was alive for them as it emerged from the words of Pier Alberto Bertazzi quoted in your message upon his death. I do not know how all of this will translate from the point of view of the revision of the Statutes of the Fraternity, but I know that when the experience of faith—precisely as I have lived it—does not become the criterion by which to look at how the church is recalling us, we inevitably end up just chattering, which is what the pope constantly warns us against.

Therefore, the criterion for coming to this recognition is the experience of faith. For this reason, I will never tire of repeating these words of Fr. Giussani that I quoted on Beginning Day: "Unless faith could be found and located in present experience [for example, during a dinner], and confirmed by it [so you come home different than how you were when you went there, with less fear about the future] [...], it would not be able to endure in a world where everything, *everything*, said and says the opposite" (ibid.). We saw this in tonight's contributions. This is the method used by God: "No one has seen God, the Son has revealed Him to us," and then: "Whoever sees me sees the Father" (ibid., p. 12).

What we are all called to is the recognition of this Presence. But how? As we have heard from one of you before, "We also do not understand anything about what you are saying, but if we leave you, to whom shall we go? Because you alone have words that give life" (ibid.). This presence was not decided by us, we did not choose it, but we found it in front of us and we recognized it, just as John and Andrew recognized it without needing who knows what kind of strategy or discussions between them. Why? Because life, "that new life two thousand years ago," said Fr. Giussani, was experienced by being "in His presence," a Presence that the disciples had recognized and that they had not chosen. "Two thousand years ago, new life was to be in His presence. It happened, staying in His presence [...]. An 'I' was born in its transparent, crystalline strength, with its vital force, with its thirst and capacity to love" (ibid.). Using the words of Fr. Giussani on Beginning Day, we can say that the method is all here: "New life was to be in His presence." But each of us might ask, What about today? Where do I recognize His presence? Where is it, while we see the churches becoming empty, no one goes to religious education, and people leave the church? Where is His presence then? The "where" is not decided by us. His presence today is where one experiences a new life! It is simple—the method doesn't change; it is as it was in the

beginning for John and Andrew. This is not a new life (pay attention to Fr. Giussani's clarification) for a short moment—as it was for the Scribes and Pharisees and for all the crowds who went to see Jesus out of curiosity, or out of interest, or to receive miracles, and then they were gone—but rather a new life that becomes more and more yours, more and more mine, by staying with His presence. Otherwise, we won't have a reason to stay either.

We will experience this new life if we identify and recognize what gives us life; otherwise, in time we will not remain tied to the church or to the movement, and we will have no reason to remain. To be able to stay in the church today (the same can be said about the movement), one needs a present experience, so real, so full of substance that nothing is more desirable. I don't think we can have a more fascinating task in the next two years than that in which the church is asking us to change the leadership of the Fraternity.

On the seriousness and loyalty with which we do this work, on the attention with which we engage in it, on the involvement we have, will depend (pay attention, here is the gravity—in the sense of decisive value —of the situation!) the possibility of discovering what we need in order to stay in the church. We can come across it by going to dinner or in the other ways we have heard being described tonight. If we start this work right now, when the time comes to begin the whole electoral process, we will be trained to recognize the presences that help us live. If, on the other hand, we waste time, when the time comes to choose, or better, to recognize with a vote who will lead us—as the church is asking us to do—we will be constrained by our reactions or our interpretations instead of by the recognition of what life gives us in the place where we encounter this life.

I wish all of you fruitful work and a good journey!

School of Community. The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, November 17 at 9:00 pm via video link. This month we will continue working on Beginning Day (as you can see there is a lot to work on!), and on chapters 5 and 6 of *Is there hope?* If we do not return to the path proposed to us by Fr. Giussani, making it our own, we will succumb to our interpretations.

I remind you that it is possible to send questions and short contributions to sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org for people outside of Italy by Friday evening, and for Italians by the Sunday evening before our meeting, leaving a mobile phone number to contact you.

Registration for School of Community 2021/2022 [for Italy]. Until November 30, it is possible to renew your registration to participate in the School of Community for the social year 2021/2022. Joining School of Community is a simple educational gesture, but—as you can see—crucial in reminding us of the seriousness of continually working on what we often take for granted. Without this work, what happened to us will disappear, and we will begin every morning by taking everything for granted.

Book of the month. I remind you that the book of the month for October and November is *Ojos que no ven* (Eyes that do not see), by José Ángel González Sainz. The Italian translation *Occhi che non vedono*, published by Bur-Rizzoli, is available both as a book and e-book.

Traces. The new subscription campaign starts on November 1 and is entitled: “Tracce chiare, amicizia lunga” (Clear traces, long friendship). Like last year, the subscription campaign invites us “to bring new friends with us.” In addition, this year we will be addressing the many new friends

who received the subscription as a gift with the previous campaign so that they can renew it themselves. We ask those who donated a subscription last year to become promoters of therenewals for these individuals, putting their initiative and creativity into play. Afterwards you can recount what happened by writing to the editorial staff of *Tracce*. Campaign details will be announced in the coming days.

The movement proposes that everyone support the following two gestures in the coming months: First, the National Food Collection Day, which will be held on Saturday, November 27 in person according to traditional methods, in compliance with the anti-Covid rules currently in effect. From Sunday, November 28 to December 5, it will also be possible at some supermarkets to continue the collection by buying gift cards, as was done last year. For information, consult the site www.bancoalimentare.it.

The other gesture is the AVSI Tent Campaign, which this year is entitled, “Development is You: The Time of Courage.” It will support projects in Haiti, Uganda, Latin America, Lebanon, and Italy for families who have been most affected by difficulties connected to the pandemic. For those who wish to organize events in support of the Tent Campaign, please contact AVSI at the references indicated at the website www.avsi.org, under “Tent Campaign.”

For us, participating in these two gestures is not just an act of solidarity, however good and useful, “according to D’Annunzio’s interpretation,” we could say. The proposal we are making can be summed up by the slogan launched years ago by the Food Bank: “Sharing the needs to share the meaning of life.” When we look in the faces of the people we meet, having in our eyes what gives meaning to our lives is the greatest act of charity we can offer. Let’s not miss the opportunity to get involved with verifying what we hold most dear. Then, perhaps, we will not take it for granted, because someone will remind us of the gift we have received.

Pandemic and Community Gestures. As we can see, little by little most of the anti-Covid limitations are being loosened or removed. Please always evaluate carefully the ways in which gestures are proposed in the communities, even consulting with professionals in the field (doctors or those responsible for safety and prevention), in order to understand what measures need to be followed. However, I invite you to consider ways of proposing gestures freely and without preconceived frameworks, even treasuring everything positive that we have discovered during these almost two years of pandemic.

For all other announcements about the life of the movement in Italy I remind you that the web platform “CL Alerts” is active and also available in the App for smartphones.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening everyone! Thank you.