

**“The soul is neither young nor old”<sup>1</sup>**

*Chiara Lubich on the Gen 4 and the Gen 5 - guidelines for formation  
(selection of extracts from writings and conversations: 1955-2007 - Part One)*

**“Children... are those who have best interpreted my ideal”**

**Man’s Voice:** Chiara Lubich was a teacher, but her love and care for children grew not from this: but from that light, the ideal, the Charism of unity, through which she looked at everything in a new way: “I love being with children”- she said – “because they are those who have best interpreted my ideal”. Let’s see now what she has to say.

**19.10.1955 - a letter to a member of a religious order<sup>2</sup>**

**Woman’s Voice<sup>3</sup>:** [...] You are surrounded by children, Father! If only you realised their value! I used to think that Jesus loves them because they are innocent. But actually, it’s because they are less marked by evil than adults, they have less that needs purifying, and if we manage to bring them to God, they receive the gifts of the spirit much more easily than adults and they quickly acquire the wisdom which is the Ideal.

If what we really want, is to give as much glory as possible to God, then we should spread the ideal among children, because that’s where our work will be most productive.

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<sup>1</sup> Selection of excerpts of Chiara Lubich - from writings and conversations - regarding children, Gen 4-Gen 5 (1955-2007) edited by the Gen 4 Centres - edition 2021. Although it does not have the scientific rigour of a study text, it is a work that wants to offer to all educators those central elements that characterise the novelty of Chiara's pedagogical approach. These "sources" will then be enriched by accompanying texts that can help in their understanding and updating. When publication is not indicated, the passages are unpublished, in the General Archives of the Focolare Movement (AGMF), the Chiara Lubich Archives (ACL) or in the Gen 4 Centres Archives.

<sup>2</sup> C. Lubich, Letter to a member of a religious order who had been transferred to a Minor Seminary (Excerpt, 19.10.1955, cit. in: AAVV, *Amatevi come lo ho amato voi*, [Love one another as I have loved you] CN, Rome 2012 p.19

<sup>3</sup> In this collection, the *Woman’s Voice* reports those words of Chiara that could not be heard directly from her, either because they are written texts or because the audio is of a low quality, recorded during informal meetings.

Look around at your children, see them as a precious mine of God's glory, not just as children, but as souls like ours, better than ours. Talk to them about our Ideal and you'll see how well you're understood! I always say I love being with children because they are the ones who best interpret my ideal. [...]

#### **Loppiano (Italy), 19.8.1966 -to the Focolarine<sup>4</sup>**

**Chiara:** [...] I think this really is the year of children and young people. Firstly, because they have been received in audience with the Pope. It's the first time we've had a card with this heading "for the boys and girls of the focolare movement".

You should have seen their reaction. It was exactly the same as that of the adults!

It was impressive, the way they clapped when they heard about it the other night! They feel the importance of the Pope exactly as we do!

I realised that the soul is neither small nor big - but it's always the soul.

Preparing articles for our magazine, we did lots of interviews with parents and educators, and we began to notice a crisis emerging. Parents and educators don't always know how to handle young people. And from what little we see on television, it's worrying what young people have to say about the problem of religion: it's either non-existent or irrelevant. It's quite shocking.

So, we need a strong, formidable group of children who can influence other children, because it is always true that children are won over by other children and young people by other young people.

So, in all these things, I feel that Jesus in the midst is telling us something – I say this with the authority of a founder- he is saying to each one of us: *Let the little children come to me!*<sup>5</sup>  
**(Applause)**

As if to say: the Ideal is not the monopoly of adults. We can't as it were put children at the bottom of the list, because the Kingdom of Heaven is made for them, too, maybe more than for us.

So, we have to change our perception and recognise the new thing the Lord wants from us this year.

What is it about the Movement, that makes me think this is the hour of children and young people?

According to me, at this point the Movement is like the grain of wheat that has died and then risen again and multiplied. We are in a beautiful phase of the Movement, where it comes into itself and appears not as a human work but as a divine one. So, for those who observe it without prejudice there is something superhuman in the Movement, something not only human but also divine, because it is a work of God.

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<sup>4</sup> C. Lubich, a talk to focolarine: Various comments about the Movement. Excerpts about children, teens and young people, Loppiano, 19.8.1966.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt 19:14

We realise it's a work of God because no human person, however intelligent, could have done something like this, the way it's spread, the way it's made up.

Once the Lord allows something of his to come to light, it's bound to be beautiful, divine, enchanting, for those who know how to grasp it and communicate it.

Children, especially the very young, are not made for the things of this world, but they are made for fairy tales, things that go beyond daily human life, things that are beautiful but more than beautiful as we normally understand it, things that have something of the miraculous about them.

Our Movement as it is now contains elements capable of truly fascinating completely and striking the souls of children in a perfect way.

It appears as a work of God and not a human work, and so there is something enchanting and adventurous about it. And young people want adventure, they want to conquer the world.

It's a matter of grasping what's there in the Movement by loving the children in front of you, because there are those elements in the Movement that can touch children whether they are four or fourteen, as long as they understand something. It is a question of knowing how to grasp it.

So what do we have to do, given that our Movement has these attributes? I repeat: it is clear that Jesus in the midst is saying that he wants the children - he wants them; we need to know how to bring them to him.

### **"An inspiration of the Holy Spirit – today the Gen 4 are born!"**

#### **Loppiano (Italy), 29.3.1972 – to the inhabitants of the Mariapolis<sup>6</sup>**

**Chiara:** [...] How were the Gen 4 born? First of all... I don't know. I don't know, because when God sends an inspiration of the Holy Spirit...

**Gen 4:** (...)

**Chiara:** Secondly... She is saying the second thing!

When God sends an inspiration, it is such a subtle breath that what you feel is that something is missing. You don't feel the reality of what is about to be born.

When the idea of Gen 4 was born in me I realized that in the Work of Mary there was an immense gap because although Mary had included every vocation - men and women religious,

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<sup>6</sup> Loppiano, 29.3.1972: meeting with the citizens of the Mariapolis: The birth of the Gen 4

priests, boys, girls - the very first thing she had done was to care for Jesus as a baby, she cradled him, carried him, nursed him, fed him... and the child Jesus played. And I thought, if we don't have a branch of Gen 4, Mary is going to ask me why there is such a big hole!

So the Gen 4 are born here, today, all those who live here in the Mariapolis, and you represent all the Gen 4 in the world **(Applause)**

They say that a child's fitness depends entirely on its first three years of life.

It's the same for the life of the spirit, for our the divine life. They say that the divine life we receive during the first three years is essential for our religious life. I think it's because children are innocent and they have grace and grace tends towards the divine, towards religious things and therefore it is easier for them to assimilate truths - through the sign of the cross, for example or simple prayers and explanations. So it's absolutely necessary that we look after children's first three years and beyond, up to the age of six.

### **Castelgandolfo (Italy), 28.4.1992 - Gen 4 Congress<sup>7</sup>**

**Chiara:** So this is a quick answer to some questions... you asked when I first had the idea of the Gen 4

Well, it was in 1972 because I was talking to the children in Loppiano and they were saying marvellous things, so I said: "we need to have Gen 4"

Then later on the Gen 4 parties started.

But the real beginning of the Gen 4 was in 1988 when we had the first mini congress. In that mini congress the Gen 4 were born. It happened like this: I went to a Congress for the Gen 3, and just here, outside, as I was leaving, I met a Dad with a little boy in his arms, and the boy said to me: "When are you going to have a congress for the Gen 4?"

And I said, "I'll have to do it straight away!"

So we did it, and you can see a picture here of the first Gen 4 congress.

### **"Little buds – the future of the tree"**

### **Rocca di Papa (Italy), 2.7.1974 - Gen 3 Congress<sup>8</sup>**

**Chiara:** "Who are the Gen 4 for you, Chiara?"

For me, the Gen 4 are very, very precious, because when they grow up, when they are even older than the Gen 2, they will be the leaders of our Movement, which will be very, very big and so it will need some good leaders.

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<sup>7</sup> Castelgandolfo, 28.4.1992, Gen 4 Congress, question n. 6

<sup>8</sup> Rocca di Papa, 2.7.1974, to the Gen 3, question n. 6

So I love the Gen 4 very much because one day they will be the leaders to guide our Movement which will be really big. **(Applause)**

**Castelgandolfo (Italy), 18.6.1988 – Gen 4 Congress<sup>9</sup>:**

**Chiara:** [...] someone asked me “How do you see the Gen 4?”  
You Gen 4 are like the little buds on a tree. Do you see? Show us the picture of the tree, Virgo.  
These are the little buds on the tree. That’s what you’re like.  
Out of the buds come the leaves, the flowers and the fruits.  
Let’s see the flowers and the leaves and the fruits.  
The fruits are red and orange and yellow.  
But if there weren’t any little buds, there wouldn’t be any flowers or leaves or fruit.  
The leaves are the Gen 3, and there are lots of Gen 3. The flowers are the Gen 2 and the fruits are the adults but they all come from the little buds.  
So you are something really precious, the future of the tree.  
I see you as something very precious.  
So here’s the branch of the tree with the little buds on it, that’s you.  
Now you can see the buds growing.  
I’ve seen little buds growing in my garden- they grew into leaves and flowers and fruit – everything came from the little buds.  
You are the hope of the Movement, because the tree is the whole Movement with the Gen 4, the Gen 3, the Gen 2 and the grown-ups.

**Augsburg (Germany), 26.11.1988 – to the communities of the Movement<sup>10</sup>**

**Eli:** Reni, a Gen 4 assistant from Munich, is asking:  
*“How was the meeting with the Gen 4?”*

**Chiara:** She’s asking how the meeting of the Gen 4 was for me. It was something very special. Almost the best meeting of the year; because I wasn’t sure if the Gen 4 would understand the Ideal; they seemed too small. But I realised they really did understand it! You have to give it in ways they can understand; not just with words but with slides, photos, mimes, games, modern things, visual things, things they can also see.  
They understand it and once they’ve accepted it, they’re taken by it more than adults. They are taken by God and his way of loving which is also ours, and they forget everything else.  
The Gen 4 are fantastic and that’s because they’re innocent. The Ideal re-awakes the potential of their baptism, it’s not slowed down by sin. It emerges in all its beauty and they want to follow Jesus.  
They are not afraid as we are by God’s call. They immediately say I want to be a focolarino They want to grow up as quickly as possible and follow Jesus straight away.

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<sup>9</sup> Castelgandolfo, 18.6.1988, at the Gen 4 Congress, question n. 3

<sup>10</sup> Augsburg, 26.11.1988: to the communities of the Movement in Germany, question n. 6

One of the most powerful things I heard them say was: "I want to be a saint and a focolarino." It was amazing.

There is great potential for the Ideal in our children. They have gone to the heart of the Ideal. A little girl asked a Gen 4: "How do you become a Gen 4?" And the reply was: "Love!" They understand that love is at the heart of our Ideal. Someone else asked a Gen 4 the same question and the answer was: "Do an act of love and you'll be a Gen 4!"

### **Loppiano (Italy), 5.5.1989 - to the inhabitants of the Mariapolis<sup>11</sup>**

**Eli:** "Do you have to be grown up to follow Jesus, do you have to be a focolarino or can you follow him another way?"

**Chiara:** That doesn't depend on you or me. It depends on God who calls you. He might call you to be a focolarina – do you see, Marta? - or to get married with a beautiful family, or to be a volunteer or in another Movement or to be a nun. It depends on Jesus. He'll tell you. If you keep on loving he'll tell you in your heart. So you don't need to worry about it. **(APPLAUSE)**

### **Castelgandolfo (Italy), 8.6.1996 - Gen 4 Congress<sup>12</sup>**

**Gen 4 Boy:** What should a Gen 4 do if they feel called, like when you were little and went to get the milk?

**Chiara:** So he says Sometimes even quite small Gen 4 sometimes feel as if someone is saying: Come with me, be all for me. Like what happened to me when I went to get the milk. I felt God was calling: Give yourself completely to me. So what should we do when that happens?

First, say thank-you – it's the greatest possible gift. Go into your heart and say, Thank you, Jesus, and never forget it.

Remember it's the best gift you could have, because as we grow older, we forget things, but you should never forget this.

Tell your Gen assistant and they will remind you about it when you get older.

There are lots of horrible things in the world which make you forget the good things, but never forget this. And when you grow up, give yourself completely to Jesus! **(APPLAUSI)**

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<sup>11</sup> Loppiano, 5.5.1989, to the inhabitants of the Mariapolis, question n. 1

<sup>12</sup> Castelgandolfo, 8.6.1996, to the Gen 4 Congress, question n. 8

**“That’s how the Gen 5 were born!”**

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 21.1.1995 – to the communities of the Movement in the Castelli Romani<sup>13</sup>**

**Chiara:** There is something beautiful that you need to know, Gen 4. Before you arrived, on the way here, in the corridor outside, I met lots of Mums with their little children, some new-borns, and they wanted me to say hello. So I gave each baby a kiss and their Mums told me what their names were.

And suddenly I had an idea: all these babies have been Christened so they belong to the Church. They don’t understand much yet, but their parents do, and their parents have promised to help them grow as good Christians. So I said to myself, their parents are part of the Movement, so why can’t these little children be part of the Movement too? And that’s how the Gen 5 started.

**(Applause)**

The Gen 5 have started and their assistants are their Mums and Dads because they are part of the Movement. They have to help these children to be good Christians and good members of the Movement, good gen 4. The Gen 5 go from zero to about 3 and a half, then they became Gen 4. So you have to help them, play with them, teach them the Ideal, teach them how to love. Even if they don’t understand very much they will understand what they see. They’ll learn how to love by watching how you love. So I am entrusting them to you. When the other Gen 4 all over the world see the video of this meeting today, they will say: This is when the Gen 5 started and Chiara has entrusted them to us.

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<sup>13</sup> Rocca di Papa (Italy), 21.1.1995: to the communities of the Movement, question 1

## **“The soul is neither young nor old”**

Chiara Lubich on the Gen 4 and the Gen 5 - guidelines for formation

*(selection of extracts from writings and conversations: 1955-2007 - Part Two)*

### **“Jesus the Teacher”**

**Man’s Voice** : Today we talk about an "educating community", and it’s said that "to raise a child you need an entire village". To ensure the well-being and safety of children we need to work together as various educators. The assistants are important figures but they need to be supported by a team.

All these concepts were present in Chiara, illuminated by that "light" given to her by God.

In 1971, in Loppiano, referring to formation, Chiara spoke of Jesus as the Teacher who lives among us, yet is God and therefore knows how to answer all questions of the people of all times". These are concepts that she had already underlined in 1966, when referring to children.

#### **Loppiano (Italy), 19.8.1966 – to the Focolarine<sup>14</sup>**

**Chiara:** It is not that we have one single delegate for the children, The whole Movement has to be committed to this. If there are days dedicated to children, everyone has to be involved: focolarini, married focolarini, possible focolarini, volunteers all those at the service of the Movement all focused on the children so that it is done well

Every aspect should be a masterpiece: the Service, with the fullest possible participation of the children, the story, the film. It takes a lot of energy to be with children, so tasks should be shared out - and that also means the whole Movement will be present with Jesus in their midst, and he will substitute parents and educators, because he is the Teacher.

We have to make sure that the whole Movement is committed to this. Decide with Jesus in the midst what needs to be said and he will draw out of the Movement that enchantment I mentioned earlier, and we’ll find ways of talking about the adventurous aspects of the Movement which attract young people.

And since everything is attractive: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet – even economy, the hundredfold, we can talk about all these things . We just need to know how to talk about them. And it’s Jesus in the midst that knows how, not individuals on their own, Jesus in the midst.

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<sup>14</sup> C. Lubich, a talk to focolarine: Various comments about the Movement. Excerpts on children, teens and young people, Loppiano, 19.8.1966



It will be such a revolution with our children and young people. You'll see what will happen next year!

The children will become a leaven for others. We can have an assistant for the children, but it shouldn't be someone who takes on all responsibility, but more as someone who keeps account of them and knows where they live, how to contact them. Then the whole Movement has to be dedicated to them, otherwise they will never become children of the Ideal. It's harder with them than with adults because we need to know how to tell them things.

This will be useful for you, too. It will help you discern the divine side of every event rather than just the human side, just the story-telling. Because unless there is something transcendent, they don't understand simple human story-telling – it doesn't enter their souls.

### **"I think it has to be several people"**

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 9.10.1989 – to the Delegates of the Movement in Milan and Trent**

**Woman's voice:** [...] We need to set up a group to look after the Gen 4 world: married focolarini, volunteers, experts in the field of education. Whenever there's a meeting they should get to work and feel responsible for it. Without counting too much on teachers who might have old fashioned ideas. But being aware that teachers who have the Ideal are experts, they have something more, [...] I think it has to be several people [...]."

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 1.03.1991 – meeting with the Gen Centres**

**Woman's voice:** "[...] parents, psychologists, child-workers, teachers," as long as they are people capable of basing everything on the Ideal. Everything is useful on that basis, but not outside it [...]"

### **"A formation which supports the Ideal"**

**Rocca di Papa (Italia), 5.12.1983 - meeting with the Gen Centres**

**Chiara:** The first and most important thing to do for the Gen 4 Movement is to form the Assistants.

It's very difficult to know how to be with children of that age, and to really give them the Ideal and the Movement, and you need a lot of experience.

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 17.01.1990 – meeting with the Gen Centres**

**Woman's voice:** "[...] The world of children is very different from all others. It's a formation which also contains pedagogy and psychology in support of the Ideal, you know, with something

appropriate to their age. They say that children learn and absorb everything during their first three years, but we have to know this. These are norms used by teachers and educators that Assistants need to know too, so as to take advantage of them. I mention psychology in the sense of knowing what their psyche is like so as to give it the imprint of the Ideal. Let's see what we can do.

### **Rocca di Papa (Italy), 25.09.2002 -to the delegates of the Movement**

**Woman's voice:** It's difficult to find adults to help the younger generations because they don't think they are important. But actually, these children are fabulous. We shouldn't judge them. Jesus says they are a model for us.

#### **"They have been entrusted to you"**

**Man's Voice:** In 1966 Chiara said we will attract children with children and young people with young people<sup>15</sup>. She entrusted each generation to the previous one: the Gen 3 to the Gen 2, the Gen 4 to the Gen 3, the Gen 5 to the Gen 4.

She encouraged the values of maternity, of the ability to generate, of caring love, of relationships which transmit the life of the gospel, the life of the ideal.

### **Rocca di Papa (Italy), 2.7.1974 Gen 3 Congress<sup>16</sup>**

**Chiara:** "What would you most like us Gen 3 to do for the Gen 4?"

This is very, very important! This year we are entrusting all the gen 4 to you. You are the Gen 4 assistants, and you have to see how to cultivate them. You might say, what do we have to do?

It's enough for us and for the church that the Gen 4 get to know Jesus. So, you could invent ways, for example, a play about baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph and the donkey. You could explain the Annunciation, the flight into Egypt, when Jesus was lost [and then found] in the Temple. Then the parables, you could do lots of little plays or even use puppets like they do in Holland, or films. And we'll help you. The Gen 1 and 2 will take on the responsibility of helping the Gen 3 to be Gen 4 assistants! ... **(Applause)**

They say that the things children learn when they are three are the most important. You could tell your experience if it is something the gen four can understand. Just use simple words. That

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<sup>15</sup> C. Lubich, a talk to the focolarine: *Various comments on the Movement. Excerpts on children, teens and young people*, Loppiano, 19.8.1966.

<sup>16</sup> Rocca di Papa, 2.7.1974, *replies to Gen 3, question 22.a*

would be their meeting. Then play a lot with them. Then teach them about the gospel with little plays or little films. We can give you lots of material. Then get them to draw and do lots of things. But we'll give you everything. You have to take on the responsibility of looking after the gen four movement this year so that its strong, even with very small children.

Even if they are just very small children watching you, they will see something. **(Applause)**

### **Christmas 1974: Message to the Gen 3<sup>17</sup>**

**Woman's voice:** Dear Gen 3 it's nearly Christmas, and I have a special wish for you this year: That you can pour out your love on to lots of Gen 4. In the last Congress they were entrusted to you, so I'd like you to see each one of them as a little baby Jesus. When Jesus grew up, he said, whatever you do to one of these little ones, you do to me. So, he takes whatever we do for the little ones as done to him. So, if you have a chance in your family or with your Gen 3 units, do something for the Gen 4. A Christmas lived like that will make Jesus and Mary very happy. Even the smallest children have to feel the flame of our revolution of love burning in their hearts. Although they are small and innocent, they can understand things, lots of things. I leave you in him, baby Jesus, with all my heart. Chiara.

### **Loppiano, 6.5.1995, to the inhabitants of the Mariapolis<sup>18</sup>**

**Eli:** Another Gen 4, Eleonora.

**Chiara:** Put your hand up, Eleonora. Is that you? Yes.

**Eli:** Chiara, I love you very much and I wish you could be near me...

**Chiara:** Look we are here! (APPLAUSE)

**Eli:** I've got two sisters who are Gen 5.

**Chiara:** Really?

**Eli:** How can they be Gen 4 like me?"

**Chiara:** It depends on you. If you love a lot, they will like you. Do they like you already, do they love you? Yes? Help them love you even more so they can't wait for you to get home and when they see you, they are excited as if they were saying: welcome home! Make them your friends as well as your sisters. Once they are your friends, you can tell them everything about the ideal, the Gen 3, the Gen 4, the Gen 5, everything. But first be friends with them, do you see Eleonora? **(Applause)**

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<sup>17</sup> C. Lubich, a message to the Gen3, in *Gen3*, n.9, December 1974, pp.4-5

<sup>18</sup> Loppiano, 6.5.1995, *to the inhabitants of the Mariapolis*, question n. 6

**Castelgandolfo (Italy), 8.6.1996 - Gen 4 Congress<sup>19</sup>**

**Gen 4 Girl:** “You entrusted the Gen 5 to us. How can we help them love? “

**Chiara:** First of all, by your example. If they see you loving others, taking care of them, giving them a biscuit, going out to play with them, then they’ll learn and they’ll say: that’s what I’ve got to do!

Another thing you can do is take them to church and explain that Jesus is there. Then they’ll understand that Jesus is there and when they go to church, they’ll talk to him and say a prayer. These are the two things to do with the Gen 5.

**Tagaytay (the Philippines), 18.1.1997 - meeting with the Gen 4<sup>20</sup>**

**Adult voice for Gen 4 Philippines:** (In Tagalog with translation over a woman’s voice)

"I’m Vera. How can we care for the gen five, so they become like us?

**Chiara:** You have to love the Gen 5 very much.

You have to play with them,  
stay with them often,  
take them in your arms,  
make friends with them.  
If you make friends with them,  
If they love you,  
when they get older they will become Gen 4.

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<sup>19</sup> Castelgandolfo, 8.6.1996, *to the Gen4 Congress, question n. 23*

<sup>20</sup> Tagaytay (Philippines), 18.1.1997, *to the Gen4, question n. 1*

## Text of video 2584M

### **“The soul is neither young nor old”**

Chiara Lubich on the Gen 4 and the Gen 5 - guidelines for formation  
(*Selection of extracts from writings and conversations: 1955-2007 - Part Three*)

**“We should give the children everything. But how should we do it?”**

### **“The 10 points of how to live the ideal when playing”<sup>21</sup>**

**Man’s Voice:** *For Chiara, loving children always meant entering into their world: understanding that you can’t love children if you don’t play with them. In the first Mariapolis<sup>22</sup> there were games for children. Time given to games was considered to be very constructive and was lived with the same intensity as other moments. We can understand the importance of this more when we read the “10 points of how to live the ideal when you’re playing”, which Chiara gave - probably in 1956*

#### **Woman’s voice:**

- 1) The child Jesus played, too.
- 2) We play to do God’s will
- 3) Jesus can be in our midst when we play
- 4) We play to make the others happy
- 5) Be pleased when the others win
- 6) Don’t be like the children who fight when they play
- 7) Don’t worry about your score because we are only human and sometimes we make mistakes
- 8) When we are playing, people should see love in everything we do

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<sup>21</sup> C. Lubich, "Decalogue of the Ideal Game" [1956] in AGMF, ACL, A Writing. The text appears in the first issue of the newsletter "Atom" dedicated to the "popetti" [little ones] in 1956. Quoted in "Abignente L. - Delama G., Una città "tutto d'or" (A Golden City), Città Nuova Edition, 2009, p. 182".

<sup>22</sup> Mariapolis (city of Mary) is the name given in the early years to the Focolare Movement's summer gatherings. The permanent little towns of witness that have sprung up in various parts of the world, starting with Loppiano, near Florence, have also been called Mariapolis.

- 9) Remember our playing isn't just a game, it's a foretaste of heaven
- 10) When Jesus and Mary watch us playing, they should see us as their own children, ready to enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Man's Voice:** For Chiara, playing doesn't mean giving less. It means finding the right way to give everything to the children, to address their souls. It means treating them as complete people, respecting their personalities, not talking to them as we would to adults. It means being prepared, getting to the heart of what we want to say; using a vocabulary of awe, amazement, beauty and art; using plays, puppets, drawings, cartoons, songs....There is a complete "ideal pedagogy" that can be glimpsed in many of the things Chiara says.

**"We are not loving children if we don't play with them"**

**Loppiano (Italy) 19.8.1966 - to the Focolarine<sup>23</sup>**

**Chiara:** [...] How should we give things to children? In my experience it's like this. We shouldn't treat them as children. We have to see them as children with a soul. And the soul isn't big or small. It's always a soul. So, we have to give everything to the children and young people of our movement. Just as in a family you speak of everything, apart from those things that have to remain private between the parents. So, with our children we have to present the movement as it is. But how do we do it? I don't mean should it be long or short, but I mean the way it's given has to be a way they can understand. Not so much making ourselves one so that they can understand, but in a way that touches their soul, with imagination.

So, we have to give everything of the movement.

If you were writing an article about the Focolare movement, you could write a whole page, or just a column. Things can be explained briefly or more fully. It depends on who it is for and what you want to express.

So first of all, you might say: when we talk about the movement today we mention focolarini, volunteers, sympathisers, the third branch and other things. Should we say will this? Yes, we should say it.

For young people, it's a question of knowing how to grasp the heroic in the vocation of the focolarini, the adventurous, the fantastic. Do you know how to grasp this? Then give it. If you don't know how to grasp it don't give it because they'll run away.

And what about the volunteers? There's something here, because it is a calling from God, so there's something attractive about it. We have to know how to give the heroic how to give the adventurous. For example, how the volunteers want to transform a city into the kingdom of God, in many ways, through the Communion of goods. We have to know how to give it. Sometimes we

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<sup>23</sup> C. Lubich, a talk to the focolarine: *Various comments on the Movement. Excerpts on children, teens and young people*, Loppiano, 19.8.1966.

just tell children little experiences, we talk about the word of life. Maybe we reduce everything to them telling their experiences. Which is all right up to a point. But we need to enlarge their souls and give them everything. That's the first thing.

Secondly, we have to give everything by making ourselves one with them but not in a pious way, in fact they are much closer to God than we are. Their guardian angels see the face of God. It is not written that the guardian angels of adults see the face of God. So, children are very close to God so we have to make ourselves one with them in a divine way which means sharing their life with them. God wants their lives to be mainly playing.

That doesn't mean we make ourselves one with them just by playing, but by understanding them in their playing. For children, playing is the equivalent of work for adults so if we don't base our lessons mainly on playing, we haven't understood anything about children. So, it's not that we play with them to make friends with them, and then when we are friends give them some morals or some catechism or the spirituality. We have to play with them because we love them. We are not loving our children if we don't play with them. Religious orders, especially those founded for children, for example by Don Bosco, have really understood this. That is, we don't just prepare all these games to make them happy so that then we can give them religion.

The founders have clearly understood the psychology of children and how they should be treated. How they should be considered and accepted as God wants. Whilst others have invented wonderful games, where children play all day long but when they go home, they're worse than before, because they were fighting because the assistants weren't there, or they hadn't realised how the children were or they didn't know about having Jesus in the midst even while playing, and that it's adults that have to do this if they're bringing the ideal.

It's essential.

I remember the reaction of some of our children when they came up here, something they said, it's something marvellous, because without realising it we had all been playing with them.

They said: this is much better than day meetings! In the day meetings we talk a lot, and we don't play very much, but here we play a lot and we don't talk very much. It's something essential for them. They need to play a lot and to speak little.

So, what's the result you might ask? I can give you the example of my nephew who is quite wild like all children! He was in a team - the leader was Gabriele, he was one of the team and they were playing the final game, a sort of Ideal gymkhana. So together with all the others, he got a medal. His father came to collect him, and he said: He'll come home with a medal.

He was so enthusiastic. He was telling Eli about all the points, the seconds, everything they did. And he said: he'll come home with a medal.

In fact, when he got home, he felt there wasn't the right atmosphere for talking. He didn't talk for a whole day, then for another day he was completely silent. The third day things felt better, and he started to talk. His father realised that all the principles of the ideal had been impressed in this boy as if they were words of God. For example: Danilo had explained all about the will of God in just 10 minutes, and the will of God had become for him the will of God. Because his previous mentality had not been religious or profound, the mentality of the ideal had impressed him as if it were God's word. Since the ideal is the gospel, it is God's word, it's good that our principles make an impression on minds that are so receptive and so innocent, our principles

which I suppose if we had the old self we could compare with other spiritualities. But they don't have that problem.

His father said it was wonderful to see how the ideal had entered into this child, how he could only speak of the ideal the ideal, the principles of the ideal. He had forgotten about the game, even though he'd played really hard.

This is just an example.

The reaction of children is incredible when we do things this way. It's a very strong -I would say it's a unique reaction, because they are not yet attached to the things of this world.

Then something else that I mentioned before. The effect on them is that these principles of the movement, which are of the holy spirit, make an impression on their souls and they become their way of thinking.

Now we have a crowd people who tomorrow will take a gospel way of thinking into society, and you can immediately see the advantages of this. More so now that they are in the midst of the world and their mentality will come up against that of the atheist children who are in all schools nowadays. It's no longer like it was in my times or in your times when all this atheism didn't exist and everyone believed in God. 15 It's even spread among children now... So, this fact of having the faith so strongly within them that it almost irremovable, this too is a characteristic of children. That's what I wanted to say. That in the movement, in our children, is this fantastic form because the movement is beautiful, it is particularly beautiful because it is divine.

### **Rocca di Papa (Italy), 20.10.1988 - with the Delegates of the Movement in Brazil**

**Chiara:** [...] If you observe children - and I didn't learn this because I was a primary school teacher, I learnt it from the holy spirit, if you watch a little girl with a doll, she has a bottle and she gives it a drink of milk. If she sees you watching her, she hides, she is shy. Because for her, she really is giving milk to the baby, she really is doing it! So, she feels she is being judged. That always happens, with all children. So, what should we do? If you see a little girl giving milk to her doll, maybe you could say: why don't you give him some coffee too? Have you put any sugar in it? And keep making yourself one with their way of playing, which is half true and half false, no not false fantasy. If you do that for a while, she is receptive and then...

Maybe you feel a bit low and you feel like crying... A mother told me that she was a bit low and she felt like crying when she couldn't go to a meeting because there was no-one to mind the children, and her little girl saw her crying and said to her: mummy, why are you crying? And her mother said how this made her feel better and she found a way of sorting things out that the little girl had suggested -she herself felt loved as if by a mother.

This means that you can say to children for example, it seems something small, but this is part of an ideal pedagogy – you can say, "I'm feeling upset." And the child makes herself one with you and says, "why?"

"Well, for this for that reason- whatever it is - but now I'm going to embrace Jesus forsaken, and I'll be fine you'll see."



And the child understands and the ideal enters in. This happens if first we've known how to enter into their world! We always need to make ourselves one.

**Montet (Switzerland), 16.9.1989 - meeting with the focolarini at the schools of formation** <sup>24</sup>

**Chiara:** [...] We can see that the Gen 4 also understand the spirituality of the movement. Of course, we don't talk to them in the way we would talk to bishops. The Gen 3 understand it as well, more than the Gen 4 although there's no such thing as more, because the Gen 4 are so transparent that they absorb everything, they are marvellous, they are the favourites of the work of Mary

**"We need to be well prepared"**

**Man's Voice:** It was Chiara herself who showed us how to prepare. Since the first Gen 4 Congress in 1988, she always wanted to know every detail, and collect the questions of the Gen 4 together. She prepared for that meeting far more than any other meeting. She asked for a slide to be prepared with photos or drawings, for every reply she was going to give, and she explained in great detail how to do it. These are the handwritten notes that Chiara sent to the Gen 4 centre. They show the outline she had prepared for each reply and where each slide should be used. In reply to the question: can you tell us about an adventure in your life, Chiara told the episode of Loretto, and these are the notes that she made to indicate which pictures to show: a slide of the fortress church of Loretto, the outside of the house, the inside of the house, an image of the holy family, and so on, for all the other answers. The preparation for that Gen 4 Congress lasted for months! Chiara herself talked about it the following October to the delegates of the movement in the zones who were meeting in Rocca di Papa.

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 17.10.1988 - meeting of the Delegates of the Movement in the zones**

**Chiara:** [...] I couldn't have imagined it, but the Gen 4 meeting was the most important meeting of the year. Because those children came... they left their parents at that age between 3 ½ and eight, they seemed to be not children but angels. It's difficult to explain - it's the most difficult thing, that's why I kept putting it off because I couldn't explain it. There was something divine about them. Because they left everything, to come for Jesus, Jesus entered in. I think the time has come when Jesus in the midst is saying to us let the little ones come to me, don't prevent them.

What we saw there, was baptism in its purest state, uncontaminated because they haven't sinned. Baptism in action, activated -the baptism that they had received with water, could be

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<sup>24</sup> Montet, 16.9.1989, Chiara to the schools of the focolarini: answers to questions - question n. 4

seen there with the Spirit, because of their meeting with the ideal. I think it would be impossible to repeat something like this in the zone, because here there was an extraordinary grace, but we'll do the best we can. We have to prepare really well. They spent months preparing. But it would be enough to let the children prepare, because it is all about doing lots of things that they tell us. So, the children and some of the gen could prepare. I'll tell you some of the things they said or some of the things that happened to give you an idea.

A little girl wrote me a letter: Dear Chiara, I had a strange experience-these were her words "strange experience". I'm an only child so I have a room all on my own. But here I was in a room with another gen four. It was like having a sister.

And that was it. This really made me think. I even mentioned it to the bishops. For me it was God's answer to a celibate priesthood. You might ask: what's it got to do with that? Because of the super-natural which doesn't destroy the natural but makes it sublime, they really were sisters. Universal fraternity isn't just a word, it's a reality because I repeat the human isn't crushed, it is made it sublime.

Another fact. I explained to the gen four that when we have the old self - because they asked me what they should do, because it's hard for them when they're down, I couldn't say to them go into your heart and embrace Jesus forsaken. That would be too complicated. Or if you have the old self deny yourself and you will live again. So, I said when you have the old self you just have to say: that's enough! And the old self will go.

Because for me, the words: that's enough! mean denying yourself, embracing ...

So at first I thought to myself: when they say they've got the old self, I'll say "Bite your tongue" - just as a figure of speech. But the focolarine said, be careful, Chiara or they'll do it!

So, I had this other idea of saying, that's enough! So, there was a little gen four girl going around Castel Gandolfo saying, "it works, it works, it works!"

"What works?"

I said, "that's enough! And he went away!"

The fact was that they had come to Jesus to consecrate themselves to give themselves. They didn't know this. But when they saw the slide of that figure which maybe you can see here of the child Mary the child who was going to the temple to consecrate herself to give herself to God as he wished, there was such silence. Because this was their moment. Four years old, this was their moment. There was such a silence. Because they saw, they saw who they were, what they had done, what they had to do. And this giving of themselves to Jesus, Jesus who makes us brothers and sisters' you can imagine with Jesus - us with Jesus, Jesus is our Father, our mother, our brother or sister: he is everything.

There was another picture maybe you can see it here: a little boy on his knees. His mother wrote that the morning after he came home, she called him to come for his breakfast "Just a minute, Mum." And he knelt down on the bed like this and said: for you, the words I had told them to say so that the whole day could be a prayer - words that his Mum says too.

Another wonderful thing was that they asked me what they should do with children who don't believe, who say: God doesn't exist, God doesn't exist. So, I had the idea of giving the reply that we always give. I showed them three pictures, because we always have to show the pictures, and

they thanked me for them. Because that's what they need, they are at the stage of visualising things not of talking about them.

So, I showed them a mountain higher than the Matterhorn, a wide, wide ocean, and a huge field of flowers. And I said did I make this? No, I didn't. Did you make it? No. Did your father make it? No. Did your grandad make it? No. No one made it. Yet someone made it. God made it. And it was such a light. They will never forget it. It will be difficult for them to lose the faith. So, they knew what they had to say.

And they said to each other I've got a friend who doesn't believe, I've got a friend who doesn't believe! As soon as I get home, I'm going to tell them this! Because they had learnt something.

We have to treat children in the knowledge that they have understood the ideal better than adults, because adults have the shadow of sin. We have to use means with which they are familiar: films, music, plays, games. They don't see games like we do, as a way of letting off steam, they take them as the ideal. They played a game about the holy journey. It was very lively, and it had stages...

**Sandro**<sup>25</sup>: Yes

**Chiara**: they took all the mattresses off the beds to make mountains which they had to climb, then there were bridges and they had to cross them. And they had to go on this holy journey. And at each stage the popi explained that this was a difficulty you had to overcome. So, they understood that these were the trials. And this was their life because their life is half game, but it's a real game to them it's not a false game. As I have often said, on other occasions and in the early days.

And they took this as having done the holy journey. And a little boy wrote to me and said: I overcame all the hurdles on the holy journey. And for him those hurdles were true. They must have been a bit difficult; he must have made an effort. But he overcame them. But for him they are part fantasy and part real.

**Man's Voice**: The second International Gen 4 Congress was held in 1990. This time too, as in all the successive congresses, Chiara prepared for it very well.

The previous May, in a meeting with Gerta and Sandro at the Gen 4 Centre, Chiara gave some ideas about how to prepare the pictures which would illustrate her replies.

**Rocca di Papa (Italy), 8.5.1990 - meeting at the Gen 4 centre with those responsible**

**Woman's Voice**: ...or we could take them from pictures.

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<sup>25</sup> Sandro Ungaro, at that time Responsible for the Gen 4 boys' Centre together with Gerta Vanderbroek, Responsible for the Gen 4 girls' Centre, both mentioned later in the text.

A girl of seven asked me: “Chiara, I often think about Paradise, can you talk to us about it” [...] So we need a slide with a picture of Paradise on it ...[...] I’m going to describe Paradise as I saw it in 1949<sup>26</sup> [...] I’m going to say:” it will be beautiful, we’ll be there with our bodies but they will be more beautiful more spiritual; we won’t need anything to eat, because Jesus is risen, and so are we ... Paradise will be in God, as if it is embraced by God, there will be fields, the sky, flowers, streams, birds, but all renewed, all beautiful... There will be dances, music, meetings with people and every time it will be a new Paradise... We will see God; we will see Mary... That’s enough for the children, but we need to draw a picture.”

[...] Then, as I’d like to begin teaching them the story of the ideal – even though they may know it already – I need to show the scenes through pictures: a bombed-out house, the fiancée dressed as a soldier, who dies in the war, a person crying over their books because they can’t carry on studying. But this is all very sad, so I want to show a picture where we are all together and we say: “everything collapses, everything is destroyed but God remains: like the sun, with a picture, with all the focolarine, seven of us ...[...]

**Man’s Voice:** Now we’ve reached 1992, the third international gen four Congress. Chiara is updating her closest collaborators at the International Centre of the movement on the preparation of the gen four Congress and its effects.

#### **Rocca di Papa (Italy), 1.05.1992 - at the Centre of the Movement**

**Chiara:** [...] I’d like to tell you about this Gen 4 Congress because it really impressed me. It impressed me because it seems to me that this is our best branch! - you see this in its fruits and in its effects. You’ll see this for yourselves. Of course, a lot of preparation goes into these meetings, and it’s necessary. [...] I’ll tell you now why it seems to be something very particular, which you at the centre of the Movement should take to heart.

First of all, because here, vocations are born immediately. As you speak: “I want to consecrate myself to God”, “I want to be the spouse of Jesus”, “I want to do what you do.” You see this more in the girls because they are more mature, although they are the same age. I hope that in two years’ time when they come back, Chiaretto will be with us... They need a role model.

That’s what they see in me: “How do you live your day, Chiara?”. Then they write to me: “I want to live like you”. “How do you do this?”. “I want to do what you do”. They need models. So, vocations immediately arise, that need to be cultivated, that mustn’t be lost. But the boys need the *popi*; then the *pope* too, because tomorrow I won’t be there, the focolarine will need to go

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<sup>26</sup>Chiara Lubich refers to the profound spiritual experience she had in the years 1949-50-51. In the history of spirituality, many people have had mystical experiences, even concerning the reality of Paradise. It is an experience that she passed on to her first companions, involving them personally right from the start, in those same years of light. In the passage quoted here, Chiara also conveys to the Gen 4, in a way appropriate to their age, that particular vision of Paradise she understood in 1949.

ahead, they don't just need to see one model, because my story is one story, but the others have their own stories and things can emerge which attract them.

The second thing is that for them, it is immediately evangelisation. They say things like: I can't wait to get home and talk to everyone in my school and to my dad and my mum and to all my friends. I want to make them all into little buds. Did you see how many little buds we brought you, Chiara?"

Almost one thousand, two hundred, and last year as well. There are so many of them and they have done it themselves. For them, its immediate to evangelise they don't have problems... Will they understand? Won't they understand? What if they don't understand...

Another thing linked to Evangelism, is the number of people conquered in proportion to the number of children who leave from here: it's far greater than the other branches. New Families win over lots of people and it's one of the most vibrant. But it's even more for the Gen 4! They win over whole groups at a time!

There's something else that makes them almost like focolarine – they give everything. They have set up little workshops because they want to live the Economy of Communion like we do. But it's not that they say: Let's hold on to this in case... No, they give everything, like the first Christians, without keeping anything back. In Holland they divided the money into thirds: a third to buy pencils, a third for sponges for the car-washing and a third to give to the needy.

I wanted to tell you these things myself so you would take them on board, not just leave it to Sandro or Gerta or Opus.

I'd like to tell you how we prepare. They are used to the television, so they are used to seeing things. And they are used to things that move quickly. Yesterday by chance I saw some cartoons and it almost left me breathless how they jumped from one to the other, with all these heroes! But this is what they are used to.

So, I prepared it, I did all my part, I put things in it that I never imagined would be so successful. For example, I said, in order to explain something, I'll tell this story, to explain something else, I'll tell that story. I prepared all three versions and I read them really well to get the story right. Then I felt I needed all the elements to be able to make a little play, something complete, with expressions with words which are rich so that they have some images in front of them. Otherwise, it doesn't enter in.

Then afterwards you'll see the extraordinary effects. That's how I prepared but not on my own- it was with the popi, with the gen four, with Gerta and Sandro. They prepared photographs so everything I said was projected as a photograph or as a drawing. So, while I was talking the children were looking at those and they were impressed by what they saw. I had to prepare very well beforehand to see the best way of describing everything. There is no comparison with how I prepare other meetings. All other meetings I just have a few points but here I had to get into their mentality: will they understand this word? Shall I say it like this or like that? Then I was also spontaneous, I suppose that's the charism. I was also a teacher but that doesn't mean anything 50 years have passed since then. Maybe it's the charism, but you have to inherit that as well. And there are effects.

**"I am with you as you take love to everyone"**

**Man's Voice:** The gaze with which Chiara looked at every child, continues today in the Focolare movement - the expression of the charism of unity which is shared with many people. Through us too, Jesus continues to speak to all children, calling them to take love to the world together with him

**Rocca di Papa, 14.6.2007 - message to the Gen 4<sup>27</sup>**

**Woman's voice:** Dear Gen 4 four, even though you are small you are much loved by Jesus, in fact you are his favourites. And Jesus has put into your hearts the biggest thing that exists: love. Love, and the more you love the more love will grow in you. Love at home, at school, love your friends and your enemies, and love will invade the world. I am with you as you take this love to everyone. Chiara

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<sup>27</sup> C. Lubich, Message to the Gen4, published in: *Gen4*, n.7-8, July-August-September 2007, p.2