

"Up Sails!"

The international letter of Faith and Light, Special edition, January 2018



Come and See

International meeting of young friends, Spain, summer 2017

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A historic first

RAÚL IZQUIERDO
Vice international coordinator

At the beginning we thought it seemed crazy... And then, little by little, we realised that it was a significant challenge for Faith and Light and, above all, a necessity. So that is why we got to work and began to lay the foundations. The first thing we did was to create a Project Team composed of people who already had experience of other similar meetings and also weren't based too far apart geographically. So they were asked to carry out this service, and accepted! Beatriz from Luzitana, Alvaro and Maitane from Iberatlantic, Javi from Terra et Mare and Raúl as vice international coordinator. They all came from the Iberian Peninsula. Then, Celine from the international secretariat joined in.

The next step was to draw up a proposal for the International Coordinating Team and the Board of Directors. We needed to have a venue that would be suitable for a meeting involving young people: with open spaces, a pool or the sea nearby, with an auditorium and a large chapel and with an airport in the vicinity. The suitable venue was the Marists house in Guardamar del Segura, Alicante, Spain. And we also had to make sure the objectives of the meeting were clear and of course its financial viability.

Among the most important objectives:

- the need to work on the formation of future leaders and people who would be capable of assuming various responsibilities in Faith and Light



or going deeper in the vocation of Faith and Light, in the mission which God is entrusting to us, and in the personal and community call of each person,

- to facilitate an international experience of Faith and Light, in which diversity and unity are lived,
- deepening links of communion between the young participant friends,
- enhancing their personal growth or creating a place of listening, help, fiesta and celebration,
- finally, living an experience for the mission, returning to our provinces and to our everyday lives for announce and give testimony.

A theme had to be chosen and, after looking at various possibilities, we chose "*Come and See*"! which is the response given by Jesus in the Gospels to two young disciples of John the Baptist who wanted to know him. What better theme could there be than this one?! Jesus doesn't give a theological speech or an explanation. He simply says to them: "*Come and see*"! This is how we got to know Faith and Light: we came, we saw.... And we stayed! And for some things you have to see, touch, smell and taste them to know them.

We had to think carefully about the target audience: young people who had already spent some time in Faith and Light and belonged and were settled in the movement and were likely to be people who could be asked to fulfil various responsibilities. And also people with a disability would be present at the meeting, as the genuine heart of Faith and Light.

Then came the meetings, the piles of e-mails and WhatsApp sent and received... Thinking together, working with a genuine team, creating links, and sharing out fiesta and responsibilities. When a team is motivated and united, everything flows quicker and the team, in addition to being a place of growth and communion, turns into a team which is effective and efficient. This does not take away from the stresses, problems and last minute unforeseen things, which always appear! However, we were clear that Jesus was there in the midst of this project and when we shared prayers, we were placing ourselves in his hands and offering our work. Lord, transform our work as you see fit for Faith and Light... May your dreams for Faith and Light become increasingly like our own.

And it happened. And the meeting was held. And it began and ended. We know that it has left a mark on the participants, and also on us! And we would like to make you participants through this "Up Sails", in which each member of the project team has written something, and we have also had contributions from other people who helped us with the preparation and organisation of the meeting. All of us were present during the Guardamar meeting. Hopefully this issue will help you to have a better idea of what the meeting was about, but, above all, to have some formation materials which you can work on with your communities. Enjoy! ■

Tomorrow is up to you

GHISLAIN DU CHÉNÉ
International coordinator

Message



Dear Friends, here we are, meeting in Guardamar for a week of shared life about the mission in Faith and Light. In our movement, we have discovered a treasure and when you find a treasure, you start jumping for joy and then seek to share it with all your friends.

Our mission is not just for a few whose wisdom, age and experience must prevail over enthusiasm, youth and inexperience!

Saint Francis of Assisi could be a role model for you; in his spirited youth, he was nicknamed the king of the festival! When young people like you join Faith and Light and behave like “kings of the festival”, it is important to let yourself be challenged and to not necessarily try to fit into a strict framework *“because that’s how it’s always been done!”* Perhaps amongst you is the one that Jesus will say to, as he said to Francis about his Church: *“Go and repair Faith and Light, which is falling into ruin”*.

Come and see what Faith and Light is today; what Faith and Light is tomorrow is up to you!

Good Luck!

Message



Loving, being loved being useful

MARIE-HÉLÈNE MATHIEU
Co-founder

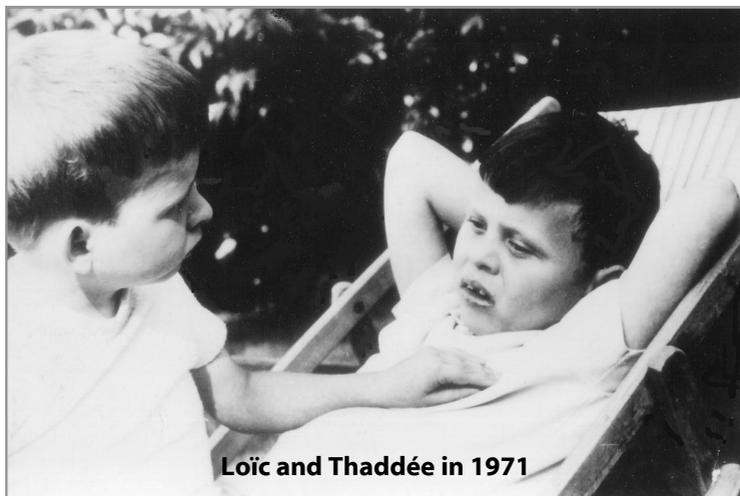
Joy! Joy at seeing you together, at imagining you together in Spain! You young people from 45 countries, from every continent, and brought together in a mysterious way by someone who still generates considerable fear: the person with an intellectual disability. Yes, Faith and Light is truly a great mystery.

You may have heard that Jean Vanier and I are the founders of this movement, which has now expanded to 83 countries. That's not true. Our idea was never to create a movement which would be called Faith and Light and to draw up a plan. No. It was really given to us by God's hand, who no doubt could no longer bear that his littlest children, the ones closest to his heart, were being made unwelcome. And yet they weren't made welcome. At that time, 50 years ago, they were unwelcome in the town of Lourdes. And Camille and Gérard, who had two children with very severely disabilities, who couldn't walk, couldn't eat and didn't understand anything - Camille didn't even know if they recognised her- they wanted to go to Lourdes to entrust them to Mary. And it was an ordeal, because people did not want to welcome them there. At the diocesan pilgrimage, they were told: *No, they won't understand anything. They will disturb the other pilgrims.*

They went to Lourdes alone, without referring to any procedures hotels told them: *You need to take your children to hospital and then you come back here.* Yet Camille and Gérard were well aware that their children didn't need a hospital, but just their tenderness and attention. The only hotel which did welcome them said: *Yes, we'll take you, but only if you have all your meals in your room.*" And for three days, they heard people in Lourdes saying: *When*

you have children like that, you stay at home. Or else, even worse, people who pitied them: *What a misfortune!* And that was even more unbearable for them.

When they returned, Camille and Gérard told us about their suffering, indignation and consternation. And we said: *But it cannot be that the children who are most precious to God's heart are not welcomed at Lourdes, by the Holy Virgin, who herself has chosen the littlest one, the most wretched in Lourdes, to deliver her message to the whole world.* And so inspiration came, surely from Her, from the Holy Spirit, which was: we will go on a pilgrimage, especially for people like Loïc and Thaddée, to show how much God loves them and how much they are able to respond to this God's love.



And so we set off, with plenty of conviction but also facing many difficulties, for there were misgivings and even obstacles and people didn't want this: *It will be too great a mass of suffering, it will be unbearable.* We said yes, families shouldn't travel alone to Lourdes, as Camille and Gérard and Loïc and Thaddée had done. Each family should be accompanied by a friend. That is why, today, you are all meeting there alongside the person with a disability. We were also told: *Parents will ask for a miraculous healing of the mind and yet we have never witnessed such a thing.* That's true, parents mustn't labour under this illusion. We are going to ask for only one thing: the miracle of hearts. May our hearts know how to discover this child, this adult or old person with a disability. At times he or she may be have several

disabilities in mind and body, but absolutely not in the heart. He or she only is only asking for one thing: to be loved, to be able to love and to be useful. These are the three most essential things for all of us. They've been concealed by many other things: desires, money, power, success... And our brothers and sisters with a disability, with whom you will be spending and have the grace of spending these few days, will teach you and keep teaching you that this is the essential thing in our lives. We have been created by love, for love, and it's Faith and Light's great treasure, which has spread rapidly and relatively easily almost everywhere because it matched the cry from the heart of the person with a disability, of his or her family and then of us too, the friends.

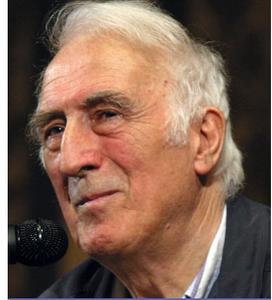
Rediscovering this is the essential thing for which we have been created for all eternity. Loving, being loved and being useful.



Faith and Light sign of peace

JEAN VANIER
Co-founder

Message



Rejoice to be with you to this wonderful event: *Come and see*. You know those words come from the Gospel of John. Two of the disciples leave John the Baptist because they have heard John the Baptist speaking about Jesus as the lamb of God who is going to baptize us in the spirit. And two of the disciples leave and start following Jesus. And Jesus says: *why are you following me* and they say: *Where do you live?* And Jesus says: *Come and see*.

So I find that's wonderful that you have taken this as the theme. *Come and see our communities* which are in the five continents. The beautiful communities that are in Spain and throughout the world. Beautiful communities, *lets come and see the beauty of people with disabilities*.

They are special people because maybe they don't have a lot of capacity to do things or to reason or to be at university but they have magnificent capacity to relate. And we are in a world where so many young people are taken up by wanting to do things, individualism, being a success, having more money, having more honor. And yet what our world needs is to love each other. We are in a world where there are so many divisions and so many fears. You know that the contrary of peace is not war, the opposite of peace is fear. People are frightened of each other and they never seek to meet the other. So, come and see, come to our communities and you will be touched. You will be touched by these men and these women who are maybe not very capable intellectually but they have this beautiful capacity



to relate. So, they can teach us if we enter into a relationship of friendship with them, they can teach us about loving each other. And that's what our world needs. That we accept people that are different because each person is a child of God. Each person is important. And I believe that the people that we welcome are magnificent teachers of love.

So, I rejoice that there is this wonderful meeting of young people there in Spain, where people are going to discover even more the beauty of people with disabilities. They can lead us on a road of accepting people as they are. They can teach us to love people, to see people under their difficulties, under their culture, under maybe differences of religion, to discover their person. And they are children of God, each one is a child of God. So, they teach us to break down the barriers of fear so that we can accept people as we are. So, in this way our communities of Faith and Light can become schools of love. And love is just not some emotion, holding each other's hand. No, love is to reveal to the other person that they have value, that they have gifts, that they are a person that is precious. So, I rejoice in your week together. May it be a wonderful time of rejoicing, swimming in the sea but also deepening an understanding of the message of Faith and Light. That Faith and Light communities are a sign of peace in a world of war, a sign where we can accept each other and we need each other to grow in greater love, grow to a greater understanding of the other person who is

different. So, I rejoice that you are there and in my heart, I will be praying with you all that you may together have a wonderful time of rejoicing and deepening and discovering together the immense beauty of people with disabilities, remembering those words of Jesus: *I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth for having hidden these things from people who are really clever, who are very powerful but that revealed them to those who are weaker.* So, I give thanks for you all and I rejoice in this time where you will be deepening together in a vision where we are called to be with Jesus, artisans of peace and of love.

So, thank you for being there and have a wonderful time together in prayer, in rejoicing, in the swimming pool, and in all the rest, deepening together in a vision. ■



Guardamar day to day





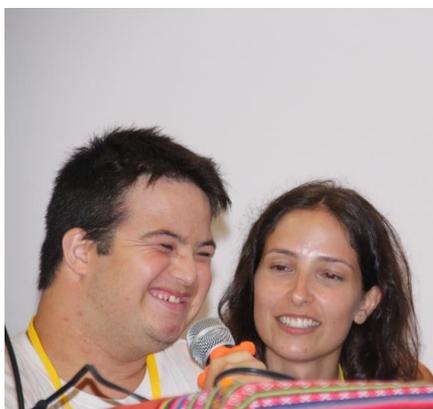
The big family

of Faith and Light

CÉLINE DOUELLE
Project team, France

What a joy to all finally meet up in Guardamar and experience, together, this first great international gathering of the young people from Faith and Light! 150 participants from 32 countries all over the world, some travelling abroad for the first time. The international family was almost complete but unfortunately 21 young people (from Zambia, Congo, Rwanda, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Philippines, Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Syria) were not able to take part in this beautiful meeting because their visas were refused despite much effort to get them. We carried them in prayer all week long and await them at the next international meeting.

From the first day, I saw each person plunge a bit into the unknown, sitting spontaneously or a little apprehensively next to a young person from another country... At Faith and Light, we communicate with the heart and there is always a way of understanding



and making yourself understood. Our friends with disabilities astonished the quieter ones by very often making conversation and showing us the way: in particular Alvaro (Spain) by proclaiming: *I am a fan of Italy!* quickly hit it off with the Italians, Elaine (United Kingdom) and Arianna (Italy), always accompanied by their beautiful smiles, were not worried about socialising and Pierre (France), with his gift for the guitar, thrilled the assembly!



I was touched by the grace that was sung, mimed or recited in a different language every day before meals and was filled with the culture of the country. Jesus joined us and united us in our differences!

At the ceremony of water and clay, we were invited to model an object and to come and place it at the feet of the Lord. The talented music section were able to transport us in a prayerful and meditative atmosphere. Alone or in pairs, but all in communion, each person was able to express themselves and offer their intentions in one form or another: a Faith and Light boat, a cross, a flower, a heart... I was lucky enough to be accompanied by Anaëlle (France) who chose to depict two hearts. She confided in me: *That one is for my mum and that one is for my dad. I love them so much.*

This time of prayer ended with a blessing. With the water that had been given to us, we traced the sign of the cross on the forehead of our neighbours. A fraternal moment with great depth and a rare intensity.

I enthusiastically followed the evening dedicated to the "Festival of song", during which we laughed a lot and applauded the 14 groups who entered! A mixed jury made up of music experts identified talents in several countries! Vocations perhaps were born that evening? Well done to these groups, occasionally made up of artists from different countries, who were able to work and rehearse together to present us with some very beautiful interpretations! I can also say that their imagination caused a stir! Thus groups like "2 for joy", "Vamos a la playa", "Francofou", "Kabanosy", "Darluz", "los peregrinos de Fe y Luz", "Baguette frite", etc.... went on stage! After much deliberation, it was "Pasta Pizza Mandolino" who finally took away the trophy! An unforgettable evening!

This week together allowed us not only to get to know one another, to educate ourselves and to certainly gain a more concrete vision of the international family of Faith and Light but also to experience unique times together, bring-



ing us closer to Jesus and the mission that he has entrusted to Faith and Light.

We “came and we saw”, so let us continue to carry the message of Faith and Light around us, let us keep the flame alive and let us stay in contact by means of the tools that have been made available to us: the Faith and Light International website, social networks, emails...

On my return from Spain, it was a joy to discover one of the first fruits of this meeting! The appointment, at the end of August, of one of the young participants, Matanda Bakali, as vice provincial coordinator for Zimbabwe! So let’s give thanks to the Lord and carry on going forward together by testifying to the good news of Faith and Light.





The little groups

Deepening and sharing

BEATRIZ OLIVEIRA
Project team, Portugal

This meeting was a privileged space of sharing and friendship. Every one could talk to one another, despite different idioms, origins and cultures. The common language that everyone spoke was the language of Faith and Light.

The feeling of unity and sharing that we all remembered from this week developed progressively. At first, people arrived with some fears, feeling closer to and more comfortable with those that came from the same country or spoke the same idiom. For many people, it was the first time that they travelled to far away. Luckily, there were some great teachers of communication: our friends with a disability. Maxime, always with a huge smile, sat down every day with someone different for lunch and dinner. He was able to communicate even with those that did not understand a word in his native French. Alvaro did not let his Spanish idiom get in the way of making many Italian friends. When Marie danced, even those that did not speak Arabic or French understood and shared her

joy and bliss. So, everyone quickly learned from these and many other good examples.

The small sharing groups played a very important role in building relationships. They gathered people that spoke the same language, although often from different countries. This was the first space where we discovered that most joys, blessings, concerns and problems of our communities were the same. We were comfortable sharing our more personal experiences, fears, hopes and our motivation. Nevertheless, also as a big group, this will (and need) to share became more and more visible. Its highpoint was the "Youth Assembly", a moment where all participants were invited to discuss key issues for Faith and Light.

Besides, informal sharing moments were very important. Music and celebration were key drivers to break barriers. For example, each day, everyone got together for half an hour to learn new songs. Quickly, these 30 minutes exploded into a happy, multi-cultural celebration and the time was not enough for all



the songs we wanted to sing! Also, at night, after the day program was finished, people got together for enjoying the mildly warm weather of Spanish nights. This led to late-night talks and friendships built, in groups of very different people. We could see groups of friends from many countries laughing, talking and singing together. We could see a Polish girl singing a popular Brazilian song with perfect accent. We could see Portuguese, Spanish and

Slovenian alike singing "Happy Birthday" in Croatian, as confident as it was their native language. And, above all, we saw everyone dance and laugh and love one another, without any barriers of fear of the unknown.

All these informal moments were privileged sharing spaces. During meals, people began to mix, seating down and talking with people they did not know yet. At the beach or the pool, the leisure moments were also important for getting to know one another. The prayers were also major sharing moments. We were sharing when the Gospel was read in a language that we did not know – Polish, Lebanese, Italian or Slovenian – but the mimes and gestures of our friends with a disability accompanied it. Also when praying with contemplative dance, people shared by holding hands, looking the other in the eyes and asking for a blessing for him. Or all the times we prayed "Holy Father" together each one in



his own idiom, unites in a beautiful multi-language prayer.

The discovery of our common struggles and joys, and common view of the world in what matters most, despite different origins, idioms, culture or confessions was daunting and beautiful at the same time. We could share our joys and pictures from our community discovering that in opposite corners of the world they were similar. That gave new ideas and a new drive.

This is why this meeting can be so important for Faith and Light at the present. Meeting other young friends from the international family was a source of joy and an impetus of motivation for all. Everything we've learned, we'll bring it back to our provinces and our communities. Above all, this meeting will be very important for Faith and Light in the future. Every participant left with a heart, like a burning fire. This meeting was also very important for the future of the provinces and communities where these young friends came from and to where they return, as people renewed their ener-

gies and will to be active at community and province level.

At the end of the meeting, a young friend opened her heart and said that this meeting had been a long-awaited miracle. The rediscovery that we can support and motivate each other, in our communities, provinces and within the big international family of Faith and Light was indeed a joy that spread throughout the meeting. The belief that the circumstances that allowed Faith and Light to prepare this meeting were miraculous is a common feeling. We all feel blessed to have been a part of it, and to be part of Faith and Light. ●





Call to belong

HELENA ESCRIBANO
Former provincial coordinator "Terra et Mare"

A few months before the meeting, the project team asked me to say a few words on the calling to belong to Faith and Light. The fundamental dimension of any calling in general, and of the calling in Faith and Light in particular is growth in community. When I met Faith and Light, a few years ago now, it would have been unthinkable for me to say a few words in front of more than a couple of people. However, when we are encouraged and protected by people who love us, by friends who believe and trust in us, we can go on a journey of growth and openness which leads beyond what is imaginable.

So, we become people mediators and revealers of a calling to growth. But to grow - in what?

While I was preparing my talk, I was told that the young delegates from each province were already committed in Faith and Light, with a solid history of belonging to our movement (although short due to their age): "la crème de la crème" of each province, our precious future. And I have to say that after a few days with them, I can attest that this was true and that *our future* is in good hands. But how much would they know about the calling and its difficulties, its risks, temptations and traps, and, above all, its real





"honey" that we are called to do things for others and we do them? It's important to care for and accompany these young people in their calling, as they deserve, so that they learn how to discern and grow every day in the calling.

In the conclusions of the meeting, these young people asked us to give them space to deploy their abilities and their commitment to Faith and Light. Their message was clear and we need to receive it, *telling them what the calling of Faith and Light is but leaving them to live it themselves*. Let's accompany the growth of their calling through their acceptance of commitment and responsibility.

It's not so much about talking about what the calling is and isn't, but rather about going deeper in it and accompanying it so that it grows and bears fruit. It is about knowing specifically what we are called to as members of Faith and Light, and how we can be faithful to this calling from God.

It is also about recognising that belonging to Faith and Light is a gift that God gave us one day, an invita-

tion to pursue a path of growth to a challenge which is none other than to become more human in the midst of a world which becomes more dehumanised. And not to do this alone, but in the company of other people who are, in turn, living the same adventure. Recognising that Faith and Light teaches us to love, admire and give thanks to what brings us to the ultimate challenge for all Christians: living in a spirit of praise for God, and together with Jesus being capable of erupting in joy at the littleness of human beings and uttering these very words: *"I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants"* (Luke 10:21)

However, perhaps the best gift associated with any calling from God is to experience his love. A love which makes people indestructible. God always calls us to something that takes us away from our comfort zone, something that is difficult. God is not interested in easy things for a very simple reason: easy things grow our ego; difficult things make it grow towards Him and it puts us





in our place with respect to Him; a more humble place, as one of God's poor. A place in which we need Him with all our strength and a place of constant conversion. Praise and constant conversion before God are, in my opinion, the two most authentic states in which a man or woman can live his or her life. If his Love helps us to live like this, then any calling is a blessing!

Before I go deeper into what makes the calling in Faith and Light specific, I would like to say something which I do not consider to be specific to the Faith and Light calling but to all callings: its link with the gifts and the wounds of the person who is called. Often, especially at the beginning we tend to believe that we have been called for our gifts despite our wounds, our history of fragility and vulnerability. And this is true, but I think the opposite is much more accurate. God has called us for our wounds, and despite our most obvious gifts, which are often a genuine obstacle when responding to Him. And this is because we never stop assimilating that the calling has more to do

with what is hidden, mysterious and unthinkable rather than what is obvious. Often, we quickly decide to say Yes. We say yes to "something" that fits with the vision that we have of ourselves and not with the vision that God has of us. He did not create man for him to be tiny, faint-hearted or cowardly, but for him to be great. In this way, people with a disability are people who are more faithful to their calling, for they teach how to abandon our needs in the arms of others and they teach the art of trust. They are great, as God would like them to be. They simply are.

But what is the specific calling of Faith and Light? I still remember the impact the following words by Jean Vanier, the cofounder of our movement: *I have no doubt that in starting L'Arche, what I desired was to create a Christian community. However, I had to discover, little by little, that this was not the main interest of Raphael and Philippe. They needed friendship and security; they needed someone who really paid attention to them, attended to their needs and desires, and would listen when they had some-*



thing to say. I think these words capture very well what our specific calling is, a calling which is born of faithfulness to an inspiration, from the Holy Spirit, which has to be discovered from day to day.

Do as the Holy Spirit inspires you to do, Jean Vanier and Marie Helene said to the 12,000 pilgrims who were assembled at the feet of the Virgin in Lourdes. And what the Holy Spirit inspired in them was to create communities in which people with a disability could celebrate their lives together with their friends; in which they could feel inhabited by Jesus and feel safe in the knowledge that this love they were receiving was a little sign of a greater love: the love that God feels for the littlest ones, his preferred ones. What a joy for those whose lives have, until now, been marked by rejection and suffering!

Our calling in Faith and Light should bring us to belong to others, as well as to offer them secure ground in which we can take root together and from this ground learn the difficult art of loving and allowing ourselves to be loved. We are

called to be this Promised Land for one another, which flows with milk and honey.

Our calling asks us to console and accompany the suffering which arises through the rejection of those who are different. In community we have experiences, and through them we give testimony that when we are together troubles are divided and joys are multiplied. Our calling as Faith and Light of course also leads us to shout to everyone about the beauty of the person with a disability who, far from being an error of nature, is one of its most astonishing successes. And as an intended creature of God, they have much to say. Our calling is to create this space for them so that their message radiates in the church and in society.

I would like to end by giving thanks to all those who live their calling in Faith and Light every day, whether they have a responsibility or not. To all those who have taught me through your example to live it and have helped me to grow in it.

Thank you, my friends! ●



The person with disability

Transforms us

FATHER ANTONIO GARCIA NAVA, Mexico

Our lives unfold through encounters. Some of these are gratifying and others not; some give us pleasure and peace and others worry, sadness and dependency. However, they always have an impact on our lives.

That is why I strongly remember my first encounters in Faith and Light. They took place shortly before my ordination as a priest given that I was asked to serve the Faith and Light community in Santa Mónica in Chihuahua Chih Mexico, and so each month friendship and affection were strengthened in the meeting with Quica and with Alfredo his brother and Rosita.



I had the opportunity to get to know Jessica and Maribel, daughters of Rosi and Héctor, who were coordinating the Faith and Light communities in Chihuahua, Father Juan Manuel Mata SJ, and, shortly afterwards, Lorenzo and Carmen, the national coordinators. This took place in a meeting over three days. There, my heart was touched by the mime of the Good Shepherd, at the end of which one of the young people with a disability remarked that his dad, who had passed away not long ago, was now with the Good Shepherd and he went away to cry. Immediately, all the other people with a disability went over to him and surrounded him with much affection. I was also profoundly moved by seeing in the mime how the Good Shepherd faced up to the wolf and looked for the sheep that had gone astray... I felt called to do the same in my future priestly life. And I felt joy when they accompanied me to my priestly ordination.

Living with them at various times during my priesthood has helped me to recognise and accept my vulnerability and my fragility.



And also to value the dignity of the person for who s/he is and not for what s/he does. At each meeting I have felt loved, accepted unconditionally and every time I learned more how to give love, how to be patient, to think of others and to know how to share.

It was quite emotional when I met Jean Vanier in the city of Querétaro, Mexico, when he came to open a L'Arche community. The encounter was very pleasant, we greeted one another and smiled, I listened to his talk and enjoyed the emotion with which he shared and I felt inside that Jean Vanier was a man full of the Holy Spirit, a happy man who transmitted his joy and his love for God. In truth, this encounter had a profound impact on my life.

I would like to go back to those who have taught me to experience life in such a different way, to people with a disability, and to give thanks that I have learned to be close to pain, to solitude, to suffering and to marginalisation. How-



ever, with them I have enjoyed a friendship that is purer, more sincere, joyful, festive and loving. To those who are so human, spontaneous, natural and have disabilities, I thank you that I have learned to accept that you have fears, anxieties, frustrations, desires, that you are not angels and that you feel, love and are loved.

I can say with gratitude that I am convinced that my heart has been moulded by the richness of these encounters, my way of thinking, of feeling, and this very priesthood and my pastoral life has been strongly marked by Faith and Light



and by each of those of us who have the great gift of living in a community, of sharing life and the story of friendship and love. I do not know any moment in my priesthood that has not had this great gift, this great richness and the continual transformation of my life over this time.

I am convinced that those who know Faith and Light are involved in the lives of these communities, which are a gift from God, will encounter at the same time a path to a new life, an adventure of friendship, of love, of change, of genuine peace and of growing joy.

Finally, the meeting that we lived in Guardamar, the smiles, the greetings, the prayers, the unity, the sharing, is still continuing as if it were only yesterday that it happened and it was a great shared richness on the part of all those of us who participated with a single heart and with such enthusiasm.

Illuminated by the call of the Apostle, Matthew, who was seen by Jesus, who called him and whom He followed immediately.

We are returning to our countries and communities, hoping that there will be many more people called to participate in this transformative experience of living in Faith and Light communities. ●





Accompaniment

Support and be supported

ALVARO GOMEZ GOMEZ
Provincial coordinator "Iberatlantic"

A very important aspect for everyone in **Faith and Light**, but especially for people who are called to greater responsibility, is accompaniment. At the Guardamar meeting we devoted a morning to working on some key aspects of accompaniment. We based our work on the material from formation sessions at the international and provincial level.

"Accompaniment" is a broad subject. I would, however, like to start from the Latin term "**cum panis**": the one who shares the bread, the one who is by your side, that person who is close to you, who listens, talks and encourages the inter-personal relationship. You could say that there are two types of accompaniment. One is accompaniment to heal wounds and enable personal integration and the people who can perform this task are specialists. The other accompaniment is pastoral and functional, which is something Faith and Light coordinators are particularly called to perform. We should bear in mind that nowadays accompaniment has a special role to play in the trans-

mission of faith, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In the Emmaus passage (Luke 24:13-25), in this accompaniment relationship, Jesus takes the bread, breaks it and gives it. Accompanying is therefore walking together, being together and eating together.

Accompaniment has always been there as a genuine characteristic of the pedagogy and spirituality of our Faith and Light movement. Without accompaniment no service can be performed, whether it is functional or pastoral (growth in faith).

There are biblical passages which we could use to talk about accompaniment: the Emmaus disciples, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd and the Prodigal Son. Each of these passages stresses the feeling of closeness despite the characteristics of people, different cultures (Samaritans) or rejection of customs (Prodigal Son). However, the attitudes of closeness are present, as are those of dialogue, openness or listening. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The joy of the Gospel", may illuminate



some aspects of the work of accompaniment. It is not an easy task.

Human beings need accompaniment from birth. And this is even more necessary for a person who has a coordination role for the community and at church. This is a task which is not very easy to carry out, and, to paraphrase Socrates, *"entrusting one's soul to someone else is a serious matter"*, it means being by his or her side and helping them in solidarity to progress through life in the decisions which need to be made.

Being an accompanier in Faith and Light is a call to be faithful to Jesus. Many people ask us: what should accompaniment in Faith and Light be like? A possible response would be: being, making, loving, walking, sharing, giving of oneself or washing one another's feet as Jesus did... But also recognising that what happens is there in you and in me, it is the bud which grows within us, which you welcome and keep in your heart.

An article written by *Joseph M Rambla* helps us to find the profile for accompaniment in Faith and Light. Starting from what is NOT accompaniment, it helps us to clarify key aspects for what good accompaniment is:

Accompaniment is not leading: That is why the person who is the accompanier in Faith and Light is not a father, or the guide, or the teacher or the director.

Accompanying is not teaching: In our communities, we find ourselves in front of people who meet





one another at very different times and stages in their formation and Christian lives. Sometimes they need to be given some knowledge of the catechesis, of the movement and of the Church. The Faith and Light coordinator (accompanier) must work to provide them with practical knowledge. Often there are many "whats", but the "whys" are missing. We need to be good trainers. The teaching or instructions side can sometimes be provided through accompaniment, but as a transitory phase and only where necessary.

Accompanying is not moving or influencing: The impact of the accompanier is not found in his/her intentionality, but in his/her truth and authenticity in the fulfilment of his/her service, which is a "Christian ministry" and not a "neutral" profession. That is why we shouldn't be concerned if a person you are accompanying goes at a different speed to the one you think they should or when s/he takes decisions

which you wouldn't take, or you dislike his/her style.....As accompaniers we should be the mirror of God for human freedom.

Accompanying is not "always more of the same": Often we realise that coordinators always have the same preoccupations, the same difficulties and the same challenges.... Your role is not to be the adviser who provides advice or solutions, but to be one of the people who brings light so that each of us can discover our own paths or detect possible diversions; to offer information or elements so that each of us has references to move forward, clues which help us to discern, to adapt and to help people to pray and take decisions inspired by the Gospel.

Accompanying is not fulfilling ourselves, but serving.

Accompaniment is not therapy: It's true that we should be able to find, investigate and train ourselves to have a minimum understanding of psychology, which is

needed by any good accompanier to recognise the psychological implications of the accompaniment that we are offering. However, we must also be able to detect if, at any time, the person needs a professional to care for them, otherwise we may run the risk of causing serious damage and wounds.

Accompanying is not becoming a group leader. We need to take the step towards adulthood. This is not just for coming up with activities. We are currently in a time of personalisation, with all that this implies. We are at the service of people and not so much of the activity performed by people.

Don't be saviours: The task of the accompanier is great and transcendent, but at the same time it must be simple and modest. Only God saves! Or as Saint Teresa of Jesus said: only Jesus is enough! That is why we must consider that the accompaniment that we carry out must be the instrument of God's work.

The art of accompaniment is never mastered: Clearly, little by little, you will gain experience and you will feel more secure. Over the many years we have been carrying out accompaniment we have always had to keep this radically modest attitude and depend on the spirit.

Accompaniment in Faith and Light is a source of water from which coordinators must go and drink; we must feel that it is a vocation to serve and an important mission for growth and life in our communities. ●



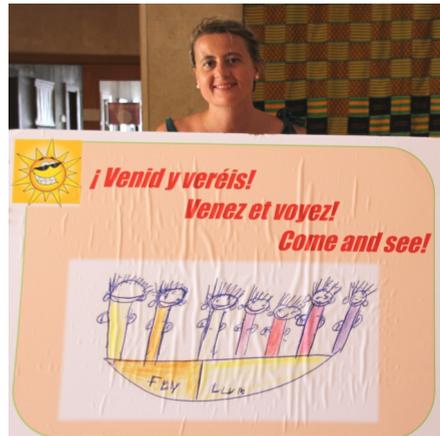


From my community to the great international family

GHISLAIN DU CHÉNÉ
International coordinator

Each day during the Guardamar meeting, we were accompanied by several characters from the Gospel. Amongst those I will focus on two, the Samaritan woman and John.

He is thirsty and has nothing with which to draw the water that he sees glimmering at the bottom of the well; did he throw a pebble down, hear the "plop" and see circles form, first at the place of impact and then spreading to the edge of the surface? This no doubt reminded him of the time when his parents brought him to the edge of the lake of Tiberias, where he enjoyed throwing pebbles to create ricochets; with each impact, this wave phenomenon reoccurred... No doubt he saw there the illustration of the result of the covenant God made with men: the men who worked with his Father spread the news that they had heard in concentric circles and God must have seen that this was good: so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it (cf. Is 55:11).



Jesus then recalled his first meeting with John by the Jordan. With Andrew, they heard John the Baptist point Jesus out to them, saying: There is the lamb of God and, immediately, following a first conversation with Jesus in which he says these words (taken as the theme of our meeting, **Come and see**), they called Peter, then Philip and then Nathanael. The first call prompted others, and the community of disciples grew like the circles on the water of the lake of Tiberias or in Jacob's well...

This movement from the centre to the outside can be found in Faith and Light, from the community to the great international family; from the family of Gérard and Camille Proffit to a presence of more than 1400 communities in 82 countries and the numbers of countries is continuing to grow...

My community

The Charter says that Faith and Light is a community movement, and almost the entirety of this document is devoted to the community. The very word "movement" expresses well that we are not something static, but there is a dynamism.

The Faith and Light charter is wonderful and deserves to be read and meditated upon. In particular, there is – right at the beginning – everything that you need to know to start a movement such as Faith

and Light: a project (the desire to help the person with an intellectual disability and his or her family to find their place in the Church and in society), which was made concrete through a pilgrimage to Lourdes, a concern to pay attention to everyone so that no one feels isolated in this great gathering, and maintaining links of friendship between the communities which have resulted from the pilgrimage.

The majority of us have discovered Faith and Light through a community, even if this was at a pilgrimage or a holiday camp. Our prayer states clearly that it is Jesus who calls us to follow him in a community. In the community, we discover the Gospel in the proper way, i.e. by taking things and people in the right order, the opposite way to how it happens in the world; like Pope Francis, who invites us not to be "worldly" people. It is the littlest, most fragile one who will teach us to discover Jesus. S/he brings us to him and teaches us to understand that the desire for all-powerfulness is the opposite of what Jesus is asking of us. Here, we discover joy, faithfulness, friendship and truth...

My region, my country and my province

However, there are other communities besides mine, those which are closer or further away according to the provinces, from Minya in Egypt or Rodrigues (Mauritius) to the Western African countries, some of which only have one community. When we are lucky enough to know a neighbouring community and can meet up with it for a feast of light or





for a regional event (pilgrimage or meeting) it is like when a family goes to meet cousins: we are virtually the same, but a little bit different! It's an opportunity to enrich ourselves with new ideas for games, songs and mimes and to feel like meeting one another again! Beyond the region, there is the country or the province which allow us to discover even more "cousins" and to create solid links of friendship...

The great international family

I discovered this great family in 1994 in Warsaw for a large international meeting; this was an unforgettable time! Seeing community members from all over the world brought together for a week was something extraordinary for me. We

may come from the four corners of the world, and yet share a common identity or come from the four corners of the horizon and become friends in five minutes for we all have something unimaginable in common!

One of the strong points of Faith and Light, ever since the first 1971 pilgrimage, has been to never forget the relationships of proximity; you can find yourself in a great crowd, but you are never lost because your community is never far away.

Another characteristic of this great family is that the links are very strong between us, we are building on the rock. We never remain indifferent to the events of the world for we know that there are friends almost everywhere who are experiencing joy or sadness... I only follow news of the events in Syria through the local Faith and Light communities; I am concerned when there is an earthquake in New Zealand or a hurricane in Madagascar... The great movement from the community to the international works both ways. Through the international coordinating team (ICT), we are always trying to listen to what the communities feed back to us: we feel that it's impossible to give guidance without first listening to what is lived. This communication must be maintained, it's vital!

Faith and Light is a call from Jesus to discover our shared humanity as brothers and sisters, whatever our physical, mental and intellectual appearance; it is a call from Jesus to understand his desire to know that

we are united, whatever our Christian traditions; it is a call to discover Jesus in the littlest and most fragile ones, whatever their race, language or religion.

In Faith and Light, we have grown in humanity. Let's tell all our brothers what we have lived in Guardamar and let's continue to throw pebbles to make ricochets - this is how Faith and Light will grow! ●





A call to serve

Leadership in Faith and Light

RAÚL IZQUIERDO GARCIA
Vice-international coordinator

And I tell you: you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. (Mt 16:18)

In Faith and Light, some of us have been asked to fulfil a service at community, provincial or international level. And before us, many others were called to fulfil similar services and generously said "yes". And after us, there will be others who will be called and who will be asked to fulfil this same service. Often the service that is asked by Faith and Light is connected to "leadership": becoming a coordinator or vice-coordinator at any level (community, province or international). This is a service which implies accompanying people, coordinating activities, encouraging others and being close and attentive to needs and to difficulties.

This leadership service in Faith and Light has three characteristics:

- This is not a service that you seek, but one that you are asked to perform. This means that there is a call. And this is a call through a community or an assembly. And finally it's a call from God. Those of us who are in

Faith and Light believe in this and that is why we can say Yes above and beyond our talents and qualities, which are always limited and poor in comparison to the mission that may be asked of us. In Faith and Light we don't *give ourselves* a mission, we don't *call ourselves* and we don't lead political campaigns to promote ourselves - instead we like to have an attitude of openness to respond to what may be asked of us at a particular time.

- This call to a service of leadership requires our yes because it





depends on our freedom. We can also say *no*. We have the opportunity to choose and to decide what we do with this call or request. Nobody is obliged to accept a call to responsibility, but we do have to stand in front of the Lord honestly and ask him: *Lord, what do you want of me at this time? What does Faith and Light need from me?* Often-times we aren't capable of asking ourselves such questions and praying about it, and we say *no* or *yes* without having lived the personal encounter with Jesus.

- The structure of Faith and Light is conceived so that we don't feel alone, especially those who hold leadership responsibility. We need to be accompanied, for someone to ask us how we're doing from time to time. How are you living your responsibility in Faith and Light? What difficul-

ties have you encountered? What joys are you experiencing? And you are also asked to do the same with others.

In the great library which is the Bible, we find many models of leadership that we can observe. On many occasions God's calls, from the prophets in the Old Testament to those which Jesus makes to his contemporaries, are calls for leadership. Jesus uses the parable of the *shepherd* when he refers to leadership: to the one who goes ahead of others, who knows each individual by name, who leaves the 99 and goes to look for the lost sheep and who gives his life for his own kind. In fact, we could say that Jesus himself is the model of the good Shepherd or the *good leader*.

Of all the possible characters, I'd like to focus on three: Moses the pastor, the woman Mary of Nazareth and Peter the fisherman. There is a common thread to the 3 characters which I will describe below:



	Initiative of God and entrusted with a mission which exceeds our own capacities	In the midst of a difficult personal and contextual situation (this is always the case)	Merits (Apparently rather few...)	Resistances and weaknesses of the "person called"	Pedagogy of God and renewal of trust
Moses <i>The pastor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex 2: 24: God heard the groaning of the slaves. Ex 3: 7: I have observed the misery, I will send you to Pharaoh. I would like you to free my people from slavery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Pharaoh wants to kill him and he escapes and flees. A small people which is the slave of a more powerful people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex 2: 6: "Is a son of the Hebrews". A pastor. Ex 4: 10: Please Lord I have never been eloquent (Difficulties with speech, perhaps a little stammer). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex 3: 6: Moses hid his face. Ex 3: 11: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Ex 4: 1: But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ex 3: 12: I will be with you. Ex 4: 12: And I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.
Mary of Nazareth <i>The woman</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luke 1: 26: The Angel was sent... and its presence and said: You will conceive in your womb and bear a son. Leadership since the Resurrection. 	<p>A woman in the cultural and historical context of Jesus is a person who was on the margins of "exclusion".</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God needs a woman. A young woman. Engaged to a carpenter of low social status (in the eyes of the time). 	<p>Luke 1: 34: How can this be, since I am a virgin?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luke 1: 28 Greetings! Luke 1: 30: Do not be afraid, for you have found favour with God. The Holy Spirit will come upon you.

<p>Peter The fisherman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mt 4: 18 Call to Peter and Andrew: <i>Follow me and I will make you fish for people.</i> - John 21: Peter is tasked with being a pastor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear of persecution. - Difficult historical context with Roman domination. - A corrupt temple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A fisherman, not very cultured. He was not connected to the temple and did not belong to any caste. - Temperamental. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mt 20: He is indignant when the mother of Santiago and John claims a good position. - Mt 26: 69: Peter's denials. - John 13: 8: <i>You will never wash my feet</i> (Peter didn't understand anything). - John 21: 21: <i>What about him? what is that to you? you, follow me.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Mt 16: 18: You are Peter and on this rock...</i>
<p>Young friend in a Faith and Light community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through an election and discernment process at community, provincial or international level. - Through a request from a coordinator to form part of a project team. - For any other concrete mission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith is not fashionable. There are a minority of us walking. - Ageing of churches and society, particularly in the West. - People with a disability looked down upon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little merit. - My own way of being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I don't have any formation. - I don't have experience. - I don't have time. - I prefer others to do this. - I don't have qualities. - It's not the best time for me. - I'm afraid of disappointing others. - I'm afraid that I'm not up to the task. - And what if I'm wrong? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You're not alone. - God is with you. - The one who called you will not leave you. - John 10: The Good Shepherd - I am the good shepherd. - I'm giving my life for my sheep. - I know (LOVE) my sheep. - They recognise me.



We are not that different from Moses, Mary or Peter. What is important is that each of us finds our path in our own sacred story.

What is leadership in Faith and Light like?

Leadership as service. Saying "yes" to a responsibility in Faith and Light is saying "yes" to a service. It is not a power, it is not a burden and it is not a privilege for one person. It is a service. The best example for you is the Washing of the Feet by Jesus for his disciples, which we find in the Gospel of John, 13. No doubt Jesus really stressed this point to his disciples: you are to serve, not to hold power. Even serving like a slave! That is scandalous, it's almost intolerable! And this is also counter-cultural today, when taking on burdens is often about enriching our pockets, ego, or our capacity to influence. But Jesus shows us another way. With a service performed with Love, not merely with will and determination. It's a Love that comes from having felt ourselves to be loved first. Ultimately we can all be called to serve, because we've all

previously been "served". We can kneel down to wash another person's feet, because previously Jesus has washed our own feet. Without love, there can be no service, no delivery and no sacrifice. When there is Love, service is more fluid, more joyful and more intuitive.... More authentic!

It is service **for a given time**. In Faith and Light we assume responsibility for a time: we know this from the first day when we say "yes". And for the duration of this concrete service, you need to think that others will need to take over from you afterwards to continue the mission of Faith and Light in this concrete service.

Faith and Light needs people who say Yes to the various responsibilities. If not, it will be difficult for the movement to continue. Faith and Light needs our commitment, our creativity and our capacities. Faith and Light needs people who say "yes" to specific roles of leadership and responsibility. If Faith and Light has difficulties finding people to accept a responsibil-

ity in specific parts of the world, we need to work on this and make this a significant objective for growth.

However, good will is not sufficient. As well as people who are prepared to say "yes", **they need to have some minimum qualities, attitudes and aptitudes** in order to assume a mission of responsibility and leadership. Formation is essential in this respect.

Here **social skills** are extremely important, which need to be honed and put into practice. An ability to listen and to listen actively, empathy (being able to put yourself in the other's shoes), assertiveness (expressing what you feel without hurting the other person), the capacity to make or receive criticism, motivation...

The centre of leadership in Faith and Light: trust in Jesus. Without Him, it will not be possible. Knowing who has trusted me... *Where would we go without you, Lord of Life?* Leadership in Faith and Light should be like that of John the Baptist, who indicates where Jesus is. Leadership which helps us to go deeper in the mission and vocation of Faith and Light for community members. A leadership that recalls that Jesus is at the centre of our communities, because he is also the centre of the life of each individual. A leadership that does not tire of announcing that people with disabilities are particularly loved by God, and that they are a treasure for our Churches and for our societies. Leadership that helps to form or to reform or to reinforce communities

as places in which to share life and faith with others, some of whom are people with a disability, in a creative and simple way. A leadership which trusts in people, which inspires, which supports, which gives thanks, which encourages them, which tries to get the best out of everyone and is faithful to what the Spirit has entrusted to Faith and Light, which is expressed in our Charter.

At the Guardamar meeting we worked and prayed on all of this. Now the fruits no longer depend on us. They are in the hands of the One who called us and loved us first. As sowers we have also done what we had to do.

Thank you Jesus, for calling us to form part of a Faith and Light community. ●





The water that I will give

become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life

FATHER MIGUEL CAMPO, sj
Community chaplain, Iberatlantic

Last summer, during the Guardamar international meeting, the organisers decided to set aside an entire morning to offering a space of retreat and a more immediate encounter with God in the silence of personal prayer. To me this seemed very significant.

At the time of writing this short contribution, I am struck by a question: why is it important, from time to time, for us to reserve ourselves space for being alone, personally, with the Lord? We can call this a time of retreat.

An initial response would be that it is because the Lord did this. In the Gospels we encounter Jesus withdrawing to pray alone (for example, Luke 5: 16 or Mark 6: 46, to give just two examples). The Lord found that it was there, in the encounter with the Father, where he discovered the source of his being and actions.

We are kept busy by so many pursuits that, like Martha, Lazarus's sister (Luke 10: 38-42) we run the risk of letting slip what is most important. In contrast, Mary knew

how to choose the best part and she will never lose sight of it.

We are all seeking to live our lives well as Christians: isn't this what we are doing in Faith and Light? We have found a place where, together with others, special friends, families and other friends, we can live and celebrate faith. And we do this, we share our lives, we reflect together, we pray together, we celebrate together and we snack together. Why wouldn't we also help one another to live this opportunity of deepening and enriching our Christian





lives through a medium, such as a retreat with prayer?

We all aspire to authenticity in our lives and especially in our lives of faith. One of the best ways to seek this authenticity is to place ourselves before the Lord with what we are, with the most naked reality of ourselves, and from there to allow ourselves to be questioned, allow ourselves to be healed and to be nourished by Jesus, the Lord of Life. The encounter with the Lord in the silence of personal prayer has a powerful and permanent transformative power. As Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, the water which he gives, as well as quenching thirst, has the gift of turning into a spring from which others can drink (John 4:14).

All of us in Faith and Light are called to help one another. Families, friends and special friends: each of us places our gift at the

service of the community. Let's also help one another to grow in that which is at the root of what we would like to be. Let's also help one another with spaces for prayer, with retreats every so often, in which we can all recognise ourselves on a journey and in need and during which we can ask the Lord, like the two from Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-25) to explain the Scriptures to us and break the bread for us, and in this way we once again feel ardour in our hearts so we can return, as they do, full of joy and of strength, to the Community: renewed and with ardent hearts.

We all need these places of depth; the retreats: our families need them, our special friends need them and young people especially need them. Many young people approach our communities and perhaps what first gets them hooked is the kindness and the



always-welcoming hearts of our special friends and the activities which we carry out. However, if a young person decides to stay it will certainly be because something in his or her life of faith, in the most intimate and profound part of his or her being has been touched. If we are all called to live our faith in community, in community we must help one another to grow in depth, to receive the nourishment so that our faith is the foundation that sustains and moves us and so we can sustain and accompany others. If a young person doesn't find in our community this nourishment that helps him or her to grow their Christian life in depth, they will end up looking somewhere else.

I think that one of these sources of nourishment, not the only one, but an important one for growing in faith, is the retreats in the community. Celebrating them periodically, preparing them carefully and living them with intensity is one of the main routes to ensure authenticity and depth in our individual and community lives. ●





Being Faith and Light

24 hours a day

JAVI ALCAZAR
Project Team, province "Terra et Mare"

When someone is passionate about football or rock music, it's very obvious: we can tell from their shirt, a sticker on their car or from one of their conversations... It's something that is with them wherever they go; their passion jumps out at you. However, although those of us who form part of a Faith and Light community are passionate about sharing our faith and building our lives alongside friends with a disability, this is not something that is obvious at first glance.

Nevertheless, we should recognise that we know this treasure and it must be reflected in our way of living. We need to try to transform the world in which we live. People with a disability have transformed us and offer us another perspective with which to view the world. And, for others, we need to be the mirror of all that they teach us.

There is no doubt that sharing faith and life with people with a disability has taught each of us dif-

ferent values and experiences, but based on my own experience, I could summarise these as:

Loving difference

In our communities, we are all different; although we connect better with some more than with others, we all love and respect one another, because we know that each person is a sacred story. But, what about in our lives? Faith and Light members cannot be like those who criticise the odd character in the office or the one who is always in class alone. On the contrary, we must be the ones who approach them and accept them as they are, not bothering what others say or what people think.

As members of Faith of Light, we must open our arms to everyone, not fear the one who is different or flee prejudices: we must love the one who has a different religion, the one who loves in a different way or the one who has different political ideas... We, more than anybody, should recall what people with disa-

bilities have suffered at the hands of those who have not broken down their prejudices in order to approach and get to know them; let's build the kingdom of God, approaching everyone and loving them, as Jesus would.

Accepting weakness

Many times in Faith and Light we have heard about the beauty of the little ones and about accepting wounds and weakness. But this should be reflected in our own lives. What happens when we aren't successful, when plans don't turn out as we'd like them to, when I don't get the partner I wished for? Often this is a source of suffering and frustration. If we believe that our special friends should accept and love their disability because it is part of them and of their essence, and we like it, let's learn to do the same with our own.

Rediscovering innocence

As happens in Faith and Light, we should allow ourselves to be surprised by little things and by the everyday. Let's get excited by the details and be rid of our shame so we can enjoy life as children do, not thinking about what others will say.

Loving without limits

When we arrived at our community, our friends with a disability loved us right from the very first day: without conditions, without expecting anything and without erecting barriers to prevent people getting to know and love them as well. This way of loving must strongly resemble the love that Jesus



had and, as members of Faith and Light, we must try to practise this from day to day.

Being committed people

Just like Jesus. He was never silent in the face of injustice, poverty or the suffering of others. And this is how the Kingdom of God is built. This is why we must commit ourselves to just causes, to Christian values and to building a better world. For this to happen we must be in the world, in associations, in movements, in the Church and in political organisations. In everything that helps to improve the lives of those who are suffering.



Being ready to serve

As Faith and Light people, we cannot be the ones who run off when an extra effort is required. We should help those who need it (in class and at work), although this does make life a little difficult for us. We shouldn't be afraid of this commitment, which requires us to be at the service of others. In our holidays in community we don't shirk our responsibilities; let's not do this in our lives either.



Being a light for the world

We have learned all of this in Faith and Light, and if we apply this to our lives, in the eyes of everyone there will be something different about ourselves and about our actions. Let's give testimony to what we have received for free and which has transformed us forever. ●





A prayer experience

MIGUEL REYES
Former provincial coordinator "Iberatlantic"

I was asked to prepare the morning prayers for the Faith and Light International Youth Meeting. Each of these had to be the door giving access to the gift of the day. The project team had proposed a daily theme with an evangelical character (Matthew, the Samaritan woman...) so we can get inspired during the day. During the morning prayer the Word of God was read and meditated

It was very important for this time not to be just like any other time, or the routine repetition of usual practice in the meetings that we hold in our communities or in the inter-community meetings. Each young person needed to confront their own "activism" in Faith and Light with what God was saying to them through the Word. When the individual confronts his or her own truth before God, s/he is capable of becoming open to his Will and continuing to look for the life project that God most wishes for each individual.

The general outline was very simple: an initial greeting to God, the reading of a Gospel passage in

which the day's character played an important role, a meditative silence so that the assistants could allow themselves to question what was read, a gesture of initial response (then during the day there would be an opportunity for each person to delve into his or her own personal response), a prayer read out alternating between languages and a final blessing, generally given by one of our special friends. And all of this was in community. The prayers were not a warm, intimate experience between God and each person, but a community experience in which the whole community, and therefore each member of the community, opened his or her heart to God.

I would like to dwell on this initial greeting. Every day we did this with a danced prayer. Sometimes it was a greeting to God, at other times we expressed the desire to place ourselves in the presence of God, or else to bless (=which breaks down as "say well" in some Latin languages); or better still, to receive God's blessing, bless the ground, our brother or sister present, some-

body who was absent or ourselves... This was about greeting God or better still receiving God's greeting gifted to us by the day and hoping that we will pay him the attention of one who is a creature before his Creator, I am a servant before the Lord.

We had to perform this greeting without words, using our own bodies. Since we have verbal language we pray with words and we sing. However, we also have non-verbal language which we use with the body serving as an instrument. Our special friends know a lot about this because very often their disability brings with it the absence of or limitations in the use of words; but they themselves teach us the richness of non-verbal expression when we sing our songs, through gestures in which the whole body expresses joy, peace, a longing for reconciliation, the coming of the Spirit, celebration and openness to the Word, etc. This has come to be one of our identifying traits in Faith and Light: each of us expresses our faith, faithfulness and desires to follow Jesus using the instruments that God has

granted us. And, in an admirable way, our special friends express their experience as believers through a prayerful dance during songs.

In Guardamar we used danced prayers (or contemplative dances) supported by music that was generally only instrumental and always serene and carefully selected so that as support for the prayer, the music could also help us to attain our objective: placing ourselves in the presence of God in order to open our hearts to his Wishes for the assistants, young people who were opening their hearts in order to discover what it is that God could be asking of them in their identity and belonging to Faith and Light. And, in subsequent discussions, many of them were thankful for the experience as an innovative and enriching way to pray. God would like to have listened to the cry which grows, in the silence of each danced prayer, from so many young people who were opening their hearts, prepared to assume responsibilities in Faith and Light. ●



Testimonies



Want to continue

Thank you for sponsoring my trip to Spain and allowed to participate in the meeting. This was a great opportunity for me to grow individually as a Christian and as a young leader. It also gave me a better sense of the international community. This conference has allowed me to gain valuable life lessons and prepared me for beginning the adult chapter of my life. Each day, we had time of formation sessions about Faith and Light and about our roles as young leaders. We were encouraged to be brave in approaching our vocation, and that it was natural to have fears and doubts.

I have a better understanding of Faith and Light's mission, and what it meant *to be part of the community*. An important role of the leader is to create an atmosphere of love, trust, and peace.

One of the themes throughout the meeting was to find solutions to attract and integrate younger friends within the community of Faith and Light. We observed that communities offering summer camps have generally managed to attract new members. Lastly, many of the people suggest that meetings like this were beneficial towards Faith and Light, and that having more conferences could possibly help attract and integrate the younger people into.

I was proud to represent the province USA West. The conference has left me excited to commit myself!



BRUCE BARNSTABLE
USA

We're lucky!

We were about 150 coming from all over the world.. All our days were full, adapted to the Spanish schedule, to be able to put in there the super program: sessions of formation (about Faith and Light, the vocation, the responsibilities, the youth and the aging communities...), time of prayer, sharing, relaxation and feast (games, swimming pool, sea, everything that you might like !) We did not have much time to rest, but anyway we did not even want to. It was incredible, as you can come from far away, but at the same time you recognize yourself as part of the same family, the family of Faith and Light. We would realize that we were doing something similar, that we knew the same songs, just in another language, that we had the same sensitivity for the little one.

Many young people realized that they were not alone, that there were many young people in Faith and Light!

When we were told what was happening in countries like Iraq or Syria where they do meetings every week because it gives them

strength, we remember our little Belgium is very calm. It has been a week full of learning experiences and contacts, full of new friends from Lebanon, Nicaragua, Portugal and many other countries. Good-byes were hard... but we all left with the same certainty: we are lucky to know Faith and Light!

KAHINA BOUZAR
AND PASCAL LEGRAIN, Belgium



Sown grain



It was a privilege to take part at this international meeting of Guardamar! All the speeches were interesting and useful. Beautifully decorated and presented. Many of the young people shared that they heard useful things and discovered a lot of new things.

First, I thought that the sea would be a great threat to the formations, but everyone was very active in all parts of the program.

Evenings were great! On the seafront, songs and dances were nice, and the evening game with Zombies was funny and very eye-catching.

What diversity! We think in a different way, languages are different, the circumstances of life are very different.

The problems shared by young people were not a discovery for me. But it's so good that they understand and try to solve them.

Our movement is poor and fragile, and in all this diversity and the difficult circumstances, we experience the Holy Spirit.

Thank you to everyone who joined the organization of this meeting, gave money and held the meeting!!! Now we will wait for the sown grain to grow. With God.

Ulyana Roy

Vice-international coordinator, Ukraine



An inspiring meeting

The first Faith and Light formation session for young people was very good for Faith and Light. Many good lectures, songs and prayers. Very good details and sending off. I was pleased that it was possible to intermingle several times with young persons from different countries.

The sharing groups were good, with good questions. It was interesting to hear the answers of young people from other countries.

It was such a joy to come and see that in other countries, members of Faith and Light live similar joys and difficulties.

I have experienced many beautiful moments during this meeting. For example, the Way of the Cross which is unusual for me. Simply and for sure this meeting was inspiring ! It must be done again in the future! It would be good!

PAVLO KOVAL
Provincial coordinator, Ukraine



To redo!



The participants from our province saw Faith and Light in a different way.

It was very important for them to see that the problems they meet in their own countries are almost the same as in other countries. They had the opportunity to discuss with others, share their experience and build friendship within our province.

The Spanish team was great. Formations were very deep and needed. It gave us ideas to provide something similar to our communities. All the topics discussed were very useful for the youth. As they are the future of Faith and Light. They are the ones who will take responsibilities in the future. We need to give them the possibility to talk, to listen and make decisions.

It was a good decision to hold this meeting and we will try to take advice and provide something similar to our province as well.

EKATERINE GACHECHILADZE, Georgia
Provincial coordinator "Between the Seas"
(Georgia, Lithuania, Czech Republic,
Russia, Slovakia)

A new course

The meeting has been a gift, each of the days were well planned and structured to live this time to the fullest. For me it was wonderful to meet many people and above all see that there are many young people willing to give their lives to the service of those who need them the most. It has been one of the best experiences of my life, something that I will always keep in my heart.

I think that through this meeting, my life has taken a new course. I have learned much more about the great family of Faith and Light and about loving the weakness. I understood that those who are weak are the heart of Faith and Light. They suffer exclusion because they have a visible disability. Some of us have invisible disabilities. Disability allows us to feel close to the suffering Christ. It is a gift and a path that also leads us to God.

ADA OLIVIA BONILLA CASTELLANOS
Honduras



I could write a book!



When I saw this request for a testimony, I immediately thought about a thousand things I had to say, a thousand images of moments I'd like everyone to see and a thousand songs that I learnt that week... and I couldn't write about all this because I would be writing a whole book! But perhaps this enthusiasm I feel is exactly what I want to let you know about.

I discovered that Faith and Light goes far beyond me, my community, my country. Faith and Light is a family that every one of us is part of.

And somehow, just knowing this, gave me a new will to devote myself to this amazing thing we have in common. And I came back home wanting to share everything I learnt from that week with all the communities in my country and inspire everyone with a fresh breath of love and joy, the same way I was inspired in Guardamar.

During that week, the whole world lived inside the same walls in such peace and love, as if we were given a few days in paradise. And now, even though some time has passed, I feel like each of us brought a bit of that paradise home and this is a real gift that God has given us.

I finish sending a hug and a kiss that embraces all of Faith and Light people around the world, thanking them for what they have given me and hoping that everything is well with them and that they may never forget, even when the times are hard, that none of us is ever alone and that Light of Faith and Light is always there for us and it's worth fighting for.

CATARINA ELIAS
Portugal

More faith and more light



The meeting was truly one of the most beautiful moment I have ever lived or felt. The cultural exchange with young people, getting to know special friends from all over the world, to be reunited in the name of the Lord with such amazing people uninterrupted for one week... All of this put some extra Faith and Light inside my heart, and I'm very thankful for it.

BIANCA SCHMIDT
Brazil

Be ready to love

This meeting was a life changing experience for me. I met God in different people from different parts of the world and specifically in the persons with disability from whom I learnt that they are only other abled. Faith and Light is a way of life and it requires one to say yes to the calling and embracing everything as Jesus on the cross, knowing and trusting that God will not forsake us. I learnt that one has to be ready to love, give and pray with their hearts, we are to do our small part and God always does the rest.

MATANDA BAKHALI
Zimbabwe



Let's grow it...

The meeting was intense, each hour was thought out in detail, sharing, prayers, socializing and even meals... everything contributed to this feeling of nostalgia and longing still remain.

My faith has grown, my commitment to Faith and Light has deepened, and my sense of service has achieved great significance. "Special friends" are the way that God found to show us what a pure human being is, without filters and whose language is love.



We are all so different, but at the same time we are all so equal. We learn not to be afraid of limitations, to let others love us as we are, and to contemplate the beauty of being children of the same Father.

The themes and characters of each day continue to accompany us, our commitment is increasing and the will to be Faith and Light 24 hours a day has reached its peak. I realize that there are so many people who share the same bonds of friendship with their communities, that people with disabilities are not alone and can be blessed.

For us, it is important to realize that there are people who follow Jesus in their daily lives, who integrate special friends into their lives and make them the center of everything in their personal life as well.

The meeting shaped our heart, took away our fears of taking on greater responsibilities.

Commitment, time, love, follow up, responsibility, Faith, these are the words of the meeting.

This meeting has placed a seed inside of me, and my community together with Jesus are watering it every day. Let's grow it.

CATARINA PINTO
Portugal

More tenderness

The meeting was very dynamic with very good formation sessions which really helped me to know the origins of Faith and Light. All the times of prayer were also very beautiful and moving.

The meeting made me feel more tenderness and love for Faith and Light, which I already had but which has grown much more.

SAMARA NALON
Brazil



A world of colors

That week has been like living in a fairy tale and, upon leaving, you see that stories can sometimes become reality.

The youth meeting enabled me to meet with a family of Faith and Light that has no limits, where distances do not matter, because even if thousands of kilometers separate us we know that we are united in one heart. The only thing that I feel is an immense joy and a great hope that another world is possible.

Thanks to this meeting for reaffirming that this is my place, and that even if anyone wants to paint us a difficult and complicated reality, there will always be young friends able to paint a world of colors.

ALEJANDRA POLO FERNÁNDEZ
Spain

The heart language

It was a great opportunity to come to this meeting. It was the first time I attended an international meeting. I realised that my friends are from all over the world! I have returned full of enthusiasm and being thankful. My special friend Rolandas was very joyful while talking to others. I noticed he knew, or had learned during the meeting, many words in other languages. This enabled him to have conversations with many friends. Or was it the universal heart language which unites us?

GEDIMINAS KVEDARAS
Lithuania



An amazing week



This week was surprising because in spite of the difference of languages, we all managed to understand each other. Nobody said: I will not be able to understand what the others say and they won't understand what I'm talking about. The solidarity was always present. The atmosphere was peaceful, during the time of prayers and times of sharing, joyful during the meals and especially during the evenings. I also want to thank you for your support along that week because as you know my grandfather passed away during the meeting. So, Thanks to all of you.

MARINE BERTIN
France West





I was born in Faith and Light

I was born in Faith and Light so I thought I knew how it feels to be part of a community. But during the meeting in Spain I experienced something new. It was a community of young people. Now I know I really need this type of community and my task is to build one in my town.

MATEUSZ POTYRALA
Poland

The washing of the feet



The meeting was full of emotions. The moment that struck me most was the washing of the feet. Like Jesus, we washed and kissed each other's feet. This was done with humanity, love and respect. I see Faith and Light with another eye now.

It's deeper than just to accompany the persons with disabilities and their families. For me Faith and Light is synonym of Love because it's what we experience when we are there. In each person with disability there is a treasure.

JOËLLE-AUDREY SPEVILLE
Rodrigues



I dared



The meeting means a great change in my way of thinking. Since this meeting, I've been more open to what's new, what's different. At the beginning, I was a bit scared because I was the only one coming from Canada but talking gradually with other people helped me to be more open to others. Also, I managed to do things that I would not have done before, such as singing or dancing in front of a group of people.

PABLO CUBILLOS QUINTANA
Canada

A call of the Holy Spirit

It was a great pleasure to be part of the International Youth meeting. At first, I thought it was a lie that Faith and Light is an international organization. I believed just like Thomas did when he touched the wounds of Jesus. During the meeting I grew in the depth of knowing what Faith and Light is. I also discovered that the challenges which we are facing in my community are the same in other countries! Above all I learnt that Faith and Light is a call of the Holy Spirit.

DESRAE MUROYIWA
Zimbabwe





A beautiful smile

Living this week with Faith and Light was one of the best experiences I've ever had in my life. The harmony was fantastic. Meeting people from all over the world and feeling all this love that each one has for Faith and Light has given me the courage to continue taking all this joy wherever I go. Everybody should have the opportunity to know Faith and Light to be better people.

The structure of the meeting was fantastic; the whole project team was great. I'm sure it was a hard and tiring job, but they didn't show us how tired they were, instead, we were always welcomed with a beautiful smile and a good sharing. I only have to thank God and Faith and Light for all the opportunities I have been granted.

KAMILA MATTOS
Brazil

I am no longer alone

When I said yes to this meeting, I had no idea what this opportunity would mean. I was afraid that maybe others would fit better. I still do not know if others could not have done more. Could not have shared more and learned more, but that makes no difference now. I saw that it is also part of accepting your role in this community. I know that in my insecurities I am not alone, and that in my vocation I am even less alone.



Different backgrounds, different problems, different reasons to answer this call but the same calling. This meeting managed to put my heart in the right place, by only being open to what was around me.

To be in Faith and Light is to let your heart be touched, be changed. I felt like I had never felt before in such

intensity what it is to love your neighbour. To not look away from our fragilities, whether physical or in the heart. With the same truthful gaze, seeing their potential and gifts. Even more to look at yourself in the same way. This did not happen only during the week but also when I came back to the frenzy of day to day life. More than one month has passed and I feel the same calling of sharing this experience with others, and to live closer and closer to 24h Faith and Light. I wish that in 10 years time, I can say just how much this meeting changed the core of my life day by day, how much it helped me put into words the precious gift that it is to be a part of (or even cross your path with this) Faith and Light. How much it helped me not just know but feel how big, how international, how universal, how generous is this family. Thank you.

SARA PAIVA
Portugal



The greatest gift



In those moments the spirituality moved me because the silence of the prayer must be heard. I found something within me that made me change my way of being and my life began to sprout. Also, all of us are the seeds chosen from the same God that is why you are part of the prayers. I met communities around the world, for example those from Italy and others ones, what I bring back to my community is wisdom. We pray for those who have not been able to participate. The united family will never be defeated. I have learned to persevere, to find a better place and I have found it thanks to you. You have filled my heart with tears of joy that I will not forget. In the depths God has spoken to me through you and you are the best gift of my life.

ALVARO BALLESTER SOLÍS
Spain

Renewed strengths

At first, this meeting allowed me to return to my community with lots of new knowledges learnt, other ones deepened, and new songs from all over the world taught by a lot of new friends. This meeting was a way to renew my strengths. As the years go by, the responsibilities and the commitment get each time bigger and sometimes we need some days like these to remember the main purpose of Faith and Light, the things we should value and the ones we shouldn't be worried about.

I grew up and I want "to be Faith and Light 24 hours/day". And, the last but not the least, this meeting gave me time to share so beautiful moments with new persons, and made a goodbye be much harder than I thought it would be. At the end, I was sad for going home but I was sure I was bringing in my heart a new family I was already part of but whom I didn't know, the international youth family of Faith and Light.

MARIANA BRITO OLIVEIRA
Portugal



Important and special

Travel to Alicante was a great experience! I thought how it will be and what will happen? I felt anxious and concerned... An I saw people that were smiling, open, easy in contact, but a little scared like me. People who understood my situation, my feelings, because their situation was similar.



All my fears disappear and are being replaced by joy and curiosity: what will happen, what amazing experiences will come in the next days...? This wonderful atmosphere, which helps you feel important and special, drives me to take part in this great event.

I know that I am a part of something great which we are all actors. Now I know that being in community is a continuous willing to build the relationships with another person, being with him or her and accompanying each other. I know that people with disability are a power of community. They help us, they raise a kindness and what is the most beautiful in us.

Now I know that relationships in community are based on accompanying and common support giving; that it is not a "simple help" but it is a mutual sharing.

Awareness of being part of something wonderful is necessary to take responsibility. To be an active member, to listen to the others carefully, giving them tips that help them to grow.

MAGDA KUPPER
Poland



A sacred space



I enjoyed the opportunity to meet so many passionate young people with mutual respect.

As the week went on, I lived beautiful exchanges with people whom I could not have conversation with. Making faces, winks, smiles and laughter became the essential means of expression for understanding each other.

We had two full group formations and two prayer times each day. Through these we were able to have functional, as well as spiritual development and insight.

I was happy to find that many of the lessons being shared to us by the staff reflected all that I have learned in my Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen readings, as well as my time living in L'Arche.

Mid-week I had the clarity to look around the room I was in and realize that I was surrounded by over one hundred people who love someone with a disability. What a truly sacred space. God was present in each and every person there.

In my small group, we were three Americans, two Hungarians, two Romanians, two Ukrainians, and a Czech woman. This smaller setting allowed us to talk more intimately about our experiences in Faith and Light. I'm thankful for the opportunity to live this experience.

Tyler Wright, USA



Despite my handicap



The Italian delegation was made up of twelve people. I have been very excited since I was asked to take part and I wondered why I had been chosen. On departure day, with my mother, Silvana, who accompanied me, we met Daniela, Martina, Sara and Federica at the airport. We immediately made friends, we looked at one another and we said: OK, here we go! I had a few problems beforehand with the transport and then with the bedroom but happily everything was quickly resolved. But I was worried and I wanted to go home immediately. My mother told me to stay calm and to sleep, that I was being pessimistic because I was tired from the journey and that tomorrow I would see the situation in a new light.

She was right. In the morning, it seemed that the problems of the evening before had never existed. Then other people arrived from Italy and the rest of the world. There were loads of us: there were disabled young people, some accompanied by a parent like me, but most were friends who were ready to help im-

mediately without being asked, as is the way in Faith and Light. There was no difference between us despite the colour of our skin, language, country or religion. I found myself propelled into a very beautiful and colourful world, full of joy and enthusiasm.

Every day, we had a thousand commitments: in the morning, after breakfast, the time of prayer in the chapel, after a conference in the auditorium, then the sea and rest, lunch, break, international music and again the seminary, sport, time of prayer, dinner and to end, the celebration. The day ended with free time to get to know one another better with the sampling of local products and beverages. It was all very fascinating, I did not feel tired because I was eager to hear all the beautiful testimonies and I wondered: But me, in my condition, what can I do? I need help, how can I help others? Of course, I can help by testifying to others how Faith and Light is good for us all.

I have found that Faith and Light is a calling that cannot be refused. The evening before leaving, we were all sad, we celebrated, but we did not rejoice because we were going to leave. The meeting has been very useful because it gave us the opportunity to meet each other, to make suggestions and talk about the different problems of the communities. All this allowed the deepening of what I already know about Faith and Light.

ARIANNA GULIANO
Italy

An incredible energy

I have been with Faith and Light since I was born. I followed my parents without ever asking any questions. I always enjoyed taking part in the meetings. I have always admired the responsibilities that my parents have taken on within the community without asking myself if I would do the same later.

I have discovered an incredible energy in these young people. Despite what is said about the problems of this generation taking on responsibilities, I was impressed to see that some of us, sometimes only just legally adults, are already assuming important responsibilities within their community or their province. Young people are very important to Faith and Light, on the one hand they ensure the future but they also allow those with a disability to not feel lonely and isolated.



Among all the testimonies that I listened to, I noticed that the reality of our community is the same in the majority of others throughout the world. The communities are aging. If this is often frustrating, with a little hindsight, I find it reasonable for people to be accompanied by the same ones throughout their life and that you do not have to look for renewal at any cost. In each community, it is its spirit and diversity that counts, this is what we have observed at this meeting.

In the face of the number of new communities that are being regularly created, I think that the future of the movement is not under threat. Personally, like a lot of people my age, I am not ready to take on responsibilities within Faith and Light whilst I do not have a stable life, I do not know where I will be living later. However, in part thanks to the super motivation that this meeting has given me, I am ready to help another community to live, and, why not, to create a new one.

MATTHIEU NAULLET
France

Faith and Light international



3, rue du Laos 75015 Paris, France
T + (33) 1 53 69 44 30 -foi.lumiere@wanadoo.fr
www.faithandlight.org
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