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## IN DIALOGUE

### GOING IN DEPTH UPM 2025

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**LESSON1** *Edited by Renata Simon and Francisco Canzani*



**Welcome to this new section**, which aims to be a tool for dialogue on the lessons of the Popular Marian University.

First of all, we would like to thank you for participating in such a large number in our first lesson this year!

Thank you for the photos you have sent of the groups who attended the lesson together and for all the feedback you have sent us.

Among the many **comments** there are several that emphasise:

- the discovery of things we didn't know about and the desire to learn more about the Statutes and the Movement;
- appreciation regarding the format of the lessons, the duration and the possibility of following the lesson in five languages;
- the desire to let many people know about these lessons.

And finally, thank you for your interesting questions. We have tried to group them together according to topics and, in this section, we will address them to the speakers of the first lesson.

## THE GIFT OF A CHARISM

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*Is it possible for something to originate from a specific charism (for example: unity) and at the same time be shared by all Christians?*

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Unity is the object of a prayer of Jesus; a very special prayer, addressed to the Father after the Last Supper. ‘Although brief,’ my exegesis teacher explained, “may they all be one” is undoubtedly the most passionate invocation in the entire Prayer and moreover focuses on the theme that ultimately unites it all’ (Our translation from: M. Laconi, *Il racconto di Giovanni* (John’s narration), Cittadella, Assisi, 1993, p. 347). Jesus repeats the word unity three times because he knows that he is asking for what the Father treasures most. He entrusts the whole Church with the mission of bringing unity to fulfilment. The first community in Jerusalem already appears with one heart and one soul! Unity is of the whole Church and for the whole Church, indeed for the whole of humanity. The Holy Spirit has given Chiara a special charism, that is, he explained to her a whole “technique” on how to live unity, starting with mutual love, Jesus Forsaken, Jesus in the midst... It is not something new, it is already present in the Gospel and in the Church; it is not something exclusive, but to be shared with all. In fact, it is a charism at the service of the whole Church. The charism of unity was given to Chiara so that, also through this charism, everyone may come to live unity in a full way: “may they be perfect in unity”. (v. 23). A perfection that, according to the Greek word *treteleiôménoi* (from *télos* = end, completion) indicates completeness, fullness. The Latin translation expressed it with the same full impact as the Greek original: *consummati in unum* (a word that Chiara was particularly fond of and she liked the Latin language), which recalls Jesus’ last words on the cross: *Consummatum est!* - it is finished (Jn 19:30). The charism is in view of the fulfilment of unity. A charism is, by definition, a gift that enables individuals to put themselves at the service of the community; ultimately it is a gift for the whole community.

**Fabio Ciardi**

## BOOKLET OF THE STATUTES

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### *How can we read the book of the Statutes if we don't have it?*

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As you know, the final approval of the Statutes took place on the 29th of June 1990. On that occasion they were printed in Italian and in several other languages. Almost all the members of the Work of Mary have a copy of the booklet that Emmaus showed us in the lesson. Changes were made in 1994, 1998, 2007 and at the beginning of 2021. They were mainly about organisational aspects of the Movement. The changes in 2021, for example, concerned the maximum number of councillors elected to the Centre of the Work of Mary.

At the moment, as Adriana said in her lesson, the Commission for the Study and Revision of the Statutes is working on incorporating the changes that followed the General Decree issued by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life on the 3rd of June 2021, which gives a set of norms on the duration of governance mandates, alternating positions in the central governance, and the corresponding renewal of people in positions of responsibility.

This may sound very simple, but it is not so simple. This period has served to understand in depth all the consequences of the Decree on our Statutes and to conform them to these.

For this reason, the printed Statutes that are circulating do not correspond to the latest norms. You will find, for example, that the term of governance is six years, but according to the General Decree it must be five years. Until we print the new edition, once the changes from the General Decree are approved, there will be this difficulty. It is also not advisable to circulate online a statute that will be amended in the very short term, even if not in very substantial aspects. In practice, we have already conformed to the Decree as is right to do. In fact, the next Assembly will be in March 2026, five years after the one in 2021.

How are we dealing with this difficulty? Many UPM followers already have the booklet of the Statutes in one of these versions and in their own language. We are referring to versions after 1990. There should also be a few copies of the Statutes in all the focolares. As we said before, they were widely circulated at the time.

We have heard that in some zones and focolares there are still books of the Statutes, there are even full boxes of these booklets! You can ask for them in the focolares, knowing, however, that after the 2026 assembly all members of the Work of Mary will receive the updated booklet.

In any case, it is important to ask the focolares, and they will organise something so that no one is without the booklet of the Statutes. It is not just any booklet - you won't find it in a bookshop - it is officially given by the Movement to all those who belong to it, to help them faithfully respond to their vocation and so that their apostolic activity may be the fruit of the Charism.

**Francisco Canzani**

## STATUTES APPROVED BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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*One question highlights the importance of looking at the Statutes together as people belonging to various Churches; another asks how non-Catholic Christians and also non-Christians are structurally included in the Work of Mary...*

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This is a very important question. And to answer it fully and precisely one would have to cover many decades of history since 1990. Moreover, one would have to examine the meaning of certain words in Canon Law. In these few words here, we hope to say something useful.

Now the question is: what is the relationship between, for example, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican focolarini, volunteers, gen, etc. and the Statutes approved by the Catholic Church?

A first formal and legal answer is given by the Statutes themselves. Articles 1, 9, 16, 20, 141-145 mention people belonging to the Movement who are of Churches and Ecclesial Communities other than the Catholic Church. I invite you to read these articles in their context in the Statutes.

A second, less formal, but essential answer is whether the legal framework offered by the Catholic Church sufficiently expresses the life and experience of unity we have in the Movement as Christians of various Churches.

It is significant and important that Article 1 of the Statutes is already open to the variety of people of the Movement. Therefore, those belonging to various Churches are a constitutive part of the Movement, even if we, as Catholics, are often not sufficiently aware of this.

I'll quote part of Article 1: «These Statutes contain the norms of life and of government for all the persons who are part of the Work of Mary. In their application to the persons who are part of the Focolare Movement, the Statutes take into account the different levels of participation in the Work of Mary. ... Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities live the spirituality inasmuch as the differences in Christian faith and in the praxis of their single Churches and ecclesial Communities will allow.»

Three things are emphasised in this article:

1. that Christians from various churches belong to the Movement;
2. that the differences in belief and practice that exist between the Churches are taken into account and respected;
3. that there are various ways of belonging to the Movement.

The ‘challenging’ Articles of the Statutes that have created and still create suffering for those belonging to various Churches are those that describe the different ways of membership. Article 17 specifies that «“Members” are the Catholic Christians» and Article 20 defines: «“Aggregates” are those Christians belonging to other Churches or ecclesial Communities who desire to be part of the Work of Mary or of one of its various ramifications.» In fact, there are focolarini, volunteers, Gen, etc. who are Evangelical, Orthodox, Anglican, etc. in the various branches of the Movement. This distinction between members and aggregates comes from Canon Law, which on the one hand wants to respect the differences that exist in faith and practice and not oblige a non-Catholic Christian in everything under a statute approved by the Catholic Church. On the other hand, this distinction between members and aggregates determines, for example, the possibility of voting at the General Assembly and access to the governing bodies of the Movement.

In 1990, Chiara, commenting on the Statute that had just been approved and realising the suffering of the focolarini of other Churches, who felt they were her true sons and daughters, immediately promised to speak to the Vatican authorities to ask if anything could be changed, to express in a better way the reality that was already being experienced in the Movement. Some changes were made, but Canon Law did not seem to allow them to go any further. Also in the following decades after Chiara's death, with groups made up of men and women focolarini from various Churches the topic has continued and continues to be deepened and studied.

If God has called people from various Churches to this Movement, which He Himself wanted so as to contribute to the fulfilment of His prayer, it is therefore of interest to all of us to find the appropriate language that expresses this reality and bears witness to it.

It is important to keep the question open, which in this case is more important than an answer that does not yet exist in a definitive and satisfactory way. This implies that each of us (Catholics and those belonging to other Churches) should feel this suffering as our own, as the suffering of the not yet fully achieved visible communion between our Churches. As we have done in the recent week of prayer for Christian unity, let us intensify our heartfelt request to the Father to speed things up. And above all, let us increase mutual knowledge and sensitivity within our our Movement regarding those who belong to a Church other than our own. In our opinion, this is the key point. We must seriously grow in this knowledge and sensitivity.

*Renata Simon*

## COMMISSION FOR THE REVISION OF THE STATUTES

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*Several requests for clarification concern the faithfulness to the Statutes in which a founder or foundress has put their all and their implementation in order to better understand the role of this Commission.*

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Thank you for this wonderful question! It is true that Chiara Lubich herself, as foundress of the Work of Mary, when the approval of the last draft of the Statutes in 2007 took place, expressed herself as follows: «this demonstrates the Movement as complete». And speaking to the young people of the Movement, she explained that after the initial period, the charismatic period - because it is the charism that founds one thing or another -, the founder/foundress in front of what is the Work of God is able to say: «this is my child». Its identity is contained in the Statute, where it is written what this Movement is, and how it is unlike any others. This child then has to grow, and that means not adding an extra eye or an extra ear, but growing, maturing... Therefore: always going more in-depth, in extension, developing, but without distorting the reality because this is the Work that God has done. It is understood, however, that with the passing of time, over the years, as Chiara already pointed out, it may be necessary to change a word, if the one written in the Statutes is no longer used; or to explain it better, if something has not been expressed perfectly, but always referring back to the thought of the founder (the Church requires this).

Something need to be revised out of obedience to the Church itself, which in its Magisterium can intervene with new directives. And this is precisely what happened recently, and this led to the establishment of the Commission to study the revision of the Statutes. With a General Decree signed by Pope Francis, changes were made to the term of office in the central governance of the International Associations of the Faithful in 2021; criteria for the participation of members when electing the people of the general governance were also stipulated. It was therefore necessary to adapt the norms of our Statutes, concerning the Governance, to these new directives. Not only that: the role of the Commission's study included - according to a criterion of priority - some of the most important Motions of the General Assembly of 2021, and was also extended to other issues concerning the internal/external forum and questions of abuse...

For what purpose? Not to write a reform of the norms, but to offer an in-depth study of the various questions through research in the Archives, on the texts of Chiara, on the documents of the Church, in an exchange of experiences with experts or other Commissions that have been established in the Movement; and thus to possibly formulate proposals for changes to the Statutes, only if necessary, on then it will be the Movement that will have to express its opinion.

*Adriana Cosseddu*

**Other questions** concerned points that will be discussed in the next lessons, such as the one asking for an in-depth look at the historical journey (it was not an easy one), which led to the approval of the Statutes. We will see this with Lucia Abignente in the third lesson.

## READING THE STATUTES

In response to the need, expressed by many, to study the text of the statutes directly, each month we will look at some parts of it together. In this first in-depth look, we will read together the Table of Contents so as to discover its structure.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS (from the 2007 Statutes)

<b>Part One:</b>	<b>NATURE, PURPOSE, SPIRIT</b>	
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<b>Part Three:</b>	<b>CONCRETE ASPECTS OF THE LIFE OF THE WORK OF MARY</b>	
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<b>Part Six:</b>	<b>SECTIONS, BRANCHES, MOVEMENTS</b>	
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<b>Part Seven:</b>	<b>GUIDELINES FOR PERSONS OF OTHER CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES BELONGING TO THE WORK OF MARY</b>	(art. 141-145)
<b>Part Eight:</b>	<b>NORMS REGARDING RELATIONS WITH FOLLOWERS OF OTHER RELIGIONS</b>	(art. 146)
<b>Part Nine:</b>	<b>NORMS REGARDING RELATIONS WITH PERSONS WITH NO PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION</b>	(art. 147)
<b>Part Ten:</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIPS WITH ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES</b>	(art. 148-153)

As we can see, there are a number of key elements to be taken into consideration. The Statutes begin by describing the juridical nature of the Movement and its general and specific goals, as well as its spirit. Of special importance is the general goal: **perfection in love**, and the specific goal: **unity according to Jesus' prayer to the Father** (see *Jn 17:21*).

Our five dialogues are privileged freeways to follow so as to help to achieve unity. The first part of the Statutes describes the general, fundamental aspects, since they are the basis, or root, of the rest of the rules contained there.

After a description of its structure and the definitions of those who make up the Work of Mary, we find a broad, insightful and detailed examination of the concrete aspects of our lives, starting with economy and work and concluding with unity and means of communication.

In the **seven aspects**, both the more spiritual and the more practical components of each are highlighted.

In part four, the governance of the Movement is described, with its various bodies and the responsibilities of each of them. Of charismatic importance are the descriptions of the figure of the President and the Co-President. This governance structure reflects Chiara's inspirations as to how the Movement was to be governed - **always with and by Jesus in the midst** - and its breadth represented in its various branches that all have a place in the General Council. It is worth reading this part carefully to understand how the Movement functions in its governance and what can be expected from each of the bodies and roles described.

Part five analyses the governance of the Movement in the different geographical areas which, as we all know, have changed throughout history. Zones, zonette and areas have had specific boundaries that have changed over the years. In this part it is also fundamental to appreciate the spirit of unity that guides the Movement in the local area and is expressed in the relationship of Jesus in the midst between the zone delegates and in the Zonal Council.

Part six speaks about the different branches, i.e. sections, branches and movements, which are an expression of the diversity of the Movement and are its beauty. Everyone has a place in our Work of Mary. The rights and the duties of those belonging to the sections, branches and movements are explained here.

Part seven concerns those of different Churches and ecclesial communities who belong to the Movement. As Christians, we have a common baptism, which incorporates us into Christ, and we all belong to the same Church of Christ. There is, however, a diversity of ecclesiologies and disciplines. Nevertheless, all Churches are on the way towards full communion. The presence of Jesus in the midst, as our spirituality teaches, could contribute to this communion.

Parts eight and nine speak of people belonging to different religions, or with no particular religious affiliation, who adhere to the spirituality of the Movement, to the extent that their conscience and religious affiliation allows them to, and who also share its commitments to universal fraternity.

With them we can live the experience of Fratelli tutti (Brothers all) that Pope Francis has been proposing to us in recent years.

As a final consideration, in our Statutes you will find many statements of a spiritual nature and some that touch on more concrete aspects. This is normal, because our spirituality, which guides us, becomes incarnate in us and among us and is expressed in the Statutes, in juridical language, through norms that help us to live the Ideal better.

In lesson 1 the **Premise** was read more than once

Other articles were also read

### The premise to every other rule

*Mutual and constant love,  
which makes unity possible  
and brings the presence  
of Jesus among all, is,  
for those who are part  
of the Work of Mary,  
the basis for their life  
under every aspect:  
it is the norm of norms,  
the premise to every other rule.*

Chiara Lubich

Art. 2 – The Focolare Movement which bears the name Work of Mary because of its characteristic spirituality, modelled upon Mary, gives Christ spiritually to the world in the diversity of its composition, its worldwide spreading, its relationship with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, with people of various religious faiths and with persons with no particular religious affiliation, and for the fact that its President is a lay woman. These all demonstrate its special bond with Mary Most Holy, the mother of Christ and of every person. It wishes to be, as much as possible, a presence of Mary on earth, almost a continuation of her.

Art. 64 - Those who are a part of the Work of Mary will seek first and foremost to possess true Christian wisdom.

They will ask God for this; they will live evangelical love (Jn 14:21); with Christ they will embrace his cross and his abandonment (see Lk 14:27) so that the presence of the Risen Lord may shine forth in their hearts, bringing with it the gifts of the Spirit.

They are to strive to be united among themselves, so that Christ who is present where there is mutual love, may enlighten their thoughts and minds (see 1 Cor 2, 12-16).