

Year 2025

Course: Recognising oneself
The Statutes: a path and a mirror

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Lesson 5

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How to read statutes: some focus from around the world

In the Statutes we are described as: 'a private, universal association of pontifical right'. What does this definition mean and how does it relate to our charism?

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro: This definition appears at the beginning of the Statutes, in Part One, which explains the identity of the Movement, and speaks about its nature (who we are), our goals (what we do) and our spirit (how we live). It appears in the first article in order to state that we have a legal personality in the Church, thus affirming our existence as a specific group of faithful, with rights and duties.

As the Work of Mary, within the life of the Church we are recognised as a movement. The Holy Spirit gives rise to charisms at the service of the Church, each with a specific way of putting the Gospel into practice: in our case this is unity, our distinguishing feature.

Our Statutes emphasise our desire to live for *ut omnes, unity*, including the most diverse categories and sectors of the faithful, of different ages and states of life (children, adolescents, adults, married and unmarried, lay, clerics, religious...), opening up a wide communion between the different vocations in the Church. The Statutes also express our complete openness to communion that we aim to have with our brothers and sisters of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with people who profess other religions, and with those who have no religious affiliation but share our desire to renew society. Therefore, the ecclesiology of communion is expressed in the Statutes, which states the norms, but also manifests the charism. This is why we can say that the Statutes have a "dual purpose": they guide and order life, both internally and externally, for those who participate fully and for those who relate to this community that is the Work of Mary. In this ecclesial context, in which we are embedded, we have been legally recognised by the Catholic Church as one of its expressions. In other words, we have been given a legal status because the Church needs to be organised, just as society needs to be organised. In the Church we have natural persons and legal persons: natural persons are the people of God, while a legal person is a group that organises itself for a certain purpose and, once legally recognised, acquires rights and duties. Examples of legal persons in the Church are: a parish, a diocese, an institute, a foundation, a prelature... and also the associations of the faithful, as in our case. Therefore, our movement is considered a legal person in the Church and expresses itself in the form of an association of the faithful.

why do they call us an association of the faithful?

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro: An association of the faithful starts when a group of faithful decide to get together or 'associate' for a specific purpose and receive the approval of the Church for that mission. This is exactly what happened to us: after Chiara and the first focolarine came together and felt the call to live for unity, other people also joined this cause.

Associations of the faithful can be public or private.

When they are public, they are born directly linked to the hierarchy, to the church authorities who are responsible for their government; just as in our countries public bodies are run directly by the state and are responsible for providing specific services to society.

Public Associations of the Faithful are governed by the church authority and are specifically dedicated to the teaching of Christian doctrine, public worship or other tasks in the name of the Church. Private Associations of the Faithful, on the other hand, such as the Focolare Movement, are those formed through the initiative of individuals, i.e. the faithful themselves, and are governed by them. They dedicate themselves to the apostolate and charity in various ways.

Let us add another element: private associations of the faithful can dedicate their work to the geographical area in which they were created: in this case they will be linked to the Church through the bishop of the diocese in which they are located; he will then be the competent authority to accompany, guide and even approve the association.

But there are other private associations that are created for an apostolate beyond the boundaries of the diocese, which feel called to offer their service to the whole Church.

In these cases, the accompaniment and supervision of a diocesan bishop is not enough, which is why they are called 'international' or 'universal' associations and are directly linked to the Holy See through a Dicastery.

This means that they are approved and established directly by the Holy See and depend on it without intermediaries. The Holy See is responsible for overseeing the development of their organisation and for this reason they are also called 'of pontifical right'.

This is our case: the Focolare Movement is therefore an association of the faithful: private, universal and of pontifical right. It was born as a private initiative of its founder with a group that wished to associate together, it is governed by its members, it is not limited to the city of Trent but extends its apostolate throughout the world. It was approved and established directly by the Holy See and its connection with the Church is through the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. This is how our Statutes legally describe us.

How should we read the Statutes today and understand the legal aspects described, in relation to the life of the Movement?

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro: The legal tone is strongly present because the Statutes are an instrument that lists the rights, duties, organisation, governance and goals of the Focolare Movement. But they also contain all of Chiara's spiritual patrimony: the charism given by the Holy Spirit, but "clothed in norms".

Therefore, to understand them, it is also necessary to have a theological view, to take into account how Chiara saw the Movement and its organisation, and also to know how to read (with a unitary reading) the important facts of our story.

These things have already been explained by Chiara herself over the years, through everything she said about the Movement and its Spirituality. We can say, therefore, that the experience of the spirituality allows us to understand the Statutes in the light of the charism, the thought and the

intentions of the founder.

And it is precisely this life that is expressed by Canon Law and that offers us a broader and more unified view. So, we discover that the Statutes are a mirror in which we can recognise ourselves, where it is possible to understand the Work of Mary by bringing together the legal, ecclesial and charismatic perspectives. This ensures that the Movement is not an "abstract entity", as large organisations often appear, but rather it becomes a home, the place where we can live the charism of unity personally and together.

Now I would like to invite you to do a practical exercise, and to see how beautiful it is to open the Statutes and find in those legal words the richness of our spirituality, our history and our mission. Let us go to the part that refers to the governing bodies, which we studied in the previous lesson, more specifically the Presidency.

Official documents tend to be very objective when referring to the government, to the presidency of an entity. They first establish the requirements for someone to perform this service and then describe the duties attached to it. In the Brazilian Constitution, for example, it is written that to be President of the Federal Republic of Brazil, a person must have Brazilian nationality, the full exercise of political and civil rights and be over 35 years old. In the Italian Constitution, the presidency can only be held by Italian citizens who have civil and political rights and are over 50 years old. In both cases, the tasks associated with this presidential function are then listed.

What do our statutes say about the presidency of the Work of Mary? They state that there should be a lay and female presidency, with the co-presidency of a focolarino who is a priest. What they state is not limited to the legal aspect (the president must be a woman, a focolarina with perpetual vows...). Let us read together what Articles 2 and 3 say.

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. 3 - The Work of Mary mirrors, in a certain way, the features of the Church, as a child reflects the profile of their mother. This is so because it is oriented toward the renewal of individuals, of the Church and of society, because of the variety and universality of the people who are part of it, and because of its goals, aspects, dialogues, and concrete works.

How beautiful are these words from the Statutes! We are a Movement that aims to be the presence of Mary, to welcome everyone as children, to give the presence of Christ to the world. Here we understand that the lay and female presidency envisaged in Article 2 is not the result of an internal government policy or a feminist tendency of the times, but of a charism given by the Holy Spirit to offer Mary's maternal presence to the world. It was a project that began with Chiara and will continue throughout history and therefore contains a prophetic element.

How should we approach the Statutes then?

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro: Let's look at the Statutes without being intimidated by the legal language and with an open heart, because, as we've seen in this wonderful course, these pages do express our spirituality and mission in legal terms, but with guidance on how to live them out.

The Statutes contain all the duties of the President and Co-President: what they must approve, what

they must follow, what their duties are in the canonical field, in regard to civil society... but they also contain the heart of their mission, God's plan. We can see the beauty of this by reading Articles 82 and 91:

Art. 82 - The President is to constantly strive to personify the ideal of the Work of Mary reflecting the role of Mary, Mother of unity, in her care for all those entrusted to her and for all those who are called, in whatever manner, to be part of the Work of Mary. Hers is to be, above all, a presidency of charity ...

Art. 91 – ... the Co-President is to consider as his first duty, to be fulfilled wholeheartedly and joyfully, that of being in the fullest unity with the President, whom he is to recognize as the symbol of the unity of the Work of Mary Thus, he will offer the President the constant possibility of considering her ideas and decisions in the light of Jesus in their midst, giving her the comfort of a greater certainty that what she asks of those over whom she exercises authority is the will of God.

These are articles that help us discover the beauty of a Work of God, that highlight its mission and state, among other things, that the President has an authority over the Work of Mary that expresses and guarantees the unity of the entire Movement; and the figure of the Co-President is extremely important, because it indicates the way in which the premise of every other rule is to be implemented in the exercise of this authority.

It states that the President, looking to Mary, cares for the Movement with a profound love (exercising the presidency of charity). The Co-President at her side guarantees Jesus in the midst and the deepest unity. In other words, besides defining the tasks of each one, the Statutes express a fundamental mandate for the governance of the Movement: the governance of Jesus in the midst.

I gave the example of the presidency, but the beauty of these responsibilities can also be found in the duties of the councillors, in the membership of the branches, in the dialogues... Because it is the beauty of the Charism that is expressed in the Statutes.

This exercise can be completed by each one of us; it is our homework to search in the Statutes for everything that concerns us and describes our belonging to the Work of Mary. Indeed, the Statutes contain the general guidelines for maintaining the unity of the Movement.

We can then also use the regulations, of the various branches, to see that they look at the "particular rules" of what is already described in general terms in the Statutes: they are therefore closely linked.

We know that the Work of Mary is spread all over the world: how is it possible to keep so many different peoples, cultures, religions and individuals together, united in a single reality?

Raphael Takougang: The General Statutes of the Movement describe a reality rooted in the Catholic Church, with its specific spirituality of unity, and at the same time they describe a structured organisation that aims to make the spirituality concrete, based on a Gospel life that has influenced millions of people around the world. Continuing the in-depth study of our Statutes, we will look at part five and part six: part five deals with the organisation of the zones and part six with the sections, branches and movements. Zones are subdivisions of the Movement in a given area, while sections, branches and movements indicate specific vocations, diversifying the level of membership of each category of people.

Two key features stand out from these norms, reflecting both the Movement's specific goal, and a Church practice often emphasized by Pope Francis in his Magisterium: these characteristics are unity and synodality.

Unity in distinction: this is the common thread running through our entire structure. Every zone, every section, every branch, every movement is oriented towards this goal: 'that all may be one', respecting the specific nature of each one in the style, we might say, of Trinitarian unity. It is a

constant reference for the relationship between the zones and the centre of the Movement and also in the relational dynamics between the different components of the zone itself.

Synodality: it is only from communion (an effective and affective communion that respects different roles and functions, different states of life) that the right way to live the charism emerges. Everyone is a key player and everyone is called to make their own contribution to the building of our common home: it is a specific gift, not uniformity, nor flattening, but variety, enhancing the richness that the different callings bring to unity.

We know that the Catholic Church, although universal, is made up of particular Churches that enjoy a certain autonomy with respect to the Holy See. Is there a way of working and autonomy for the Movement at a local level?

Raphael Takougang: Article 115 of the Statutes defines the zone as "the Work of Mary ... present in a given region". This does not mean that the Movement is a confederation of zones, autonomous in the different areas, but that the entire Movement is present in each zone. Therefore, each zone is not a piece of the Movement, but the whole Movement, just as Christ's Church is present and active in each particular Church. The Latin expression in the Code of Canon Law (CIC) renders this analogy better: "*in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit* " (in which and from which subsists the one and only Catholic Church). It is up to the President of the Movement to establish a zone, i.e. to create a zone, to change its geographical area and to appoint, in accordance with Article 84 of these General Statutes, with the consent of the General Council, a man and a woman delegate for each zone of the Movement. For some years now, the practice has been for this appointment to take place after a broad consultation of the members of the Movement, in the zone and outside it, on possible candidates for this position. An established zone is also said to be constituted when it has at least both sections constituted in accordance with their regulations and the main expressions of the Movement adequately developed, so that they can be represented in the Zone Council. In practice, the zone is said to be constituted when each section has at least three constituted focolares, in addition to the focolare of the zone delegate, each having at least four focolarini living in community and two married focolarini with promises. Each zone has its own governing bodies which depend on the Centre of the Movement. "To ensure an ever-vibrant unity, on both the spiritual and operative levels, between the Central Governing Body and the Work of Mary in the zones, and to assure a unified and balanced development of the zones," the statutes specify that "the President is to visit the zones" (Article 116) and that the two zone delegates will make periodic trips to the Centre to renew the bond of fraternal unity and report on the progress of their zone.

I'd like to suggest an image to describe what these "visits" are... Let us think for a moment of the Movement as a tree: the Centre is the trunk, the zones are the main branches. The President's visit is like the sap that from the trunk reaches each branch, ensuring the harmonious growth of the entire tree. The two zone delegates are responsible for the Movement in the geographical area entrusted to them. They have a central role in the Statutes, which describe their tasks in precise general terms. It is an office, which has certain requirements and is for a fixed term. The office is for three years and can be reconfirmed consecutively three times. All zone delegates leave their office as soon as a new President of the Movement is elected. The role of the two zone delegates could be described as a complex Trinitarian role. They are called first and foremost to keep the unity between them alive and to continually draw together in unity the various components of the zone, while maintaining the necessary and 'sacred' distinctions that exist in the Movement in the zone. The authority of the zone delegates, depending on the President whom they represent in the zone, is focused on the unity between the zone and the Centre of the Movement and within the zone itself, where they ensure that every activity and relationship is based on the closest unity. Article 118 of

the General Statutes then lists a non-exhaustive series of the tasks of the zone delegates, whose common denominator is again the unity between the two delegates, from which everything must originate and to which everything must converge.

In carrying out their mission to the full, the zone delegates each have two councils, one distinct and the other mixed, both with consultative and executive functions, which are irreplaceable in the decision-making processes, because they are both an expression of communion and service, which ensure that every decision is taken after listening with love, and being open to Trinitarian relationships between the various components of the Movement in the zone.

In her Diary of June 1997 Chiara says: *"Therefore, our first duty is this: to rope ourselves together in order to climb the slope of the divine will, because the will of God for us has to be expressed by souls united with all the others. We must keep this present, have it in mind and especially in practice, something fixed, as our first natural duty... Everything else is extra."* These are Chiara's words.

Finally, to complete part five, I invite you to read articles 127 and 128 which concern the zone assembly, a very important organ of the zone, which is how the members of the Movement participate in the General Assembly.

All those who belong to the Work of Mary - there are many people and they belong to different realities as we explained How do the Statutes maintain the specific nature of each one, while at the same time also give value to the whole people, the one family?

Raphael Takougang: Article 129 of the General Statutes says: "The Work of Mary (Focolare Movement) has specific sections and branches, each made up of persons who are part of the Work of Mary according to their particular vocation."

Therefore, one can belong to the Focolare Movement in various ways, according to the level of adherence of each one, to live the charism of unity and the commitment to spread it in one's own environment.

To belong to the Work of Mary is to respond to a call from God to live the spirituality in a particular branch, which involves different commitments according to the specific calling, and to respond to it, which requires personal preparation and discernment and with those responsible. Imagine a large choir where each vocal section (sopranos, altos, tenors, basses) has its own tonality and melody, but together they create a perfect harmony. In this way, each section, each branch and movement of the Work of Mary contributes, in its own way, to the unity of the whole. It is an image that evokes warmth, welcome and sharing. We are not simply an organisation, but a community of people united by a common ideal. Like a mosaic where each tile is fundamental to create the beauty of the whole. The sections of the men and women Focolarini are the pillars of the Movement, because of their total donation to God. The Focolares in a geographical area are places where the spirituality is lived out permanently, by focolarini living in community and married focolarini, 24 hours a day, as consecrated people keeping Jesus in the midst, who commit themselves to be bearers of the light of the charism, guarantors of the authenticity of everything that is done to spread the charism.

The branches are the arms of the Movement in the midst of the world. Made up of people from every social and cultural sphere, they aim to witness, in the various areas of life, that we can live for a united world if we see our differences as riches, and gifts to be offered to one another for an ever more harmonious coexistence.

Each section, each branch, each movement is oriented towards this goal: that all may be one. The two sections of the Movement and the branches depend on the President according to what the Statutes and the respective regulations say and they follow her decisions and directives concerning the life of the Movement.

The movements are groups of people who share the nature, goals and spirituality of the Movement

according to their own characteristics and contribute to its life through wide-ranging activities. The movements are like 'channels' through which the charism of unity reaches specific areas of society. For example, the New Families Movement might organise a course for couples in crisis, bringing the charism of unity into real challenging situations.

The structure and composition of the Movement reflect its richness and diversity, but also its profound unity. By understanding how we are organised, we can better live our vocation and contribute to the accomplishment of Chiara's dream, which is none other than Jesus' prayer before he died (I repeat it again): 'That all may be one' (Jn 17:21).

Mong the various riches and the diversity we have heard about from our two speakers, there is also the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. What place do they have in our Statutes, which are approved by the Catholic Church?

Elfriede Glaubitz: It's my task to present to you the last part of the Statutes, which seems like an appendix, but which contains important features, because it concerns the dialogues which the movement engages in. They are parts seven, eight, nine and ten. I'd like to first look at parts seven, eight and nine of our Statutes and I'll explain part ten at the end. Parts eight and nine contain only one article in this regard, while part seven contains five articles concerning Christians who are not baptised in the Catholic Church and who belong to the Movement.

These norms in the last part of the Statutes can only be understood in the context of the Statutes as a whole. In the first article we can already read that the Statutes contain the norms of life for all persons belonging to the Movement while taking into account their various ways of belonging; these norms are different for Catholics, for Christians who are not Catholics, for followers of other religions and for persons of no particular religious affiliation. And that article already refers us to parts seven to nine.

Article 2 describes the variety in the composition of the Work of Mary, its worldwide spreading, its relationships with Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with people of various faiths or even of no particular religious affiliation. These various ways of belonging and the multiplicity of dialogues in the Movement itself, in the Church and in the world are typical characteristics of an ecclesial movement.

When Pope John Paul II visited the Mariapolis Centre in Rocca di Papa on the 19th of August 1984, he said that the Work of Mary with all its dialogues has the features, the physiognomy of the Church as expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Council described how the Catholic Church lives these dialogues. You will know the dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR) and the decree on religious freedom *Dignitas Humanae* (DH). All these documents are important for our lives and for our dialogue with others. We live these four dialogues in the Catholic Church, together with those belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with followers of other religions and with people of various faiths and convictions, as expressed in Chapter II of the first part of the Statutes, in Art. 6, which deals with the specific goal of the Movement. I quote:

On this foundation, the Work of Mary is committed:

- a. to work for an ever deeper unity among the faithful of the Catholic Church ...
- b. to establish relationships of fraternal communion and common witness with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities ...

The Work of Mary aims:

- c) (to practice) together the "Golden Rule," through dialogue and engaging in activities... (with) the followers of other religions ...
- d) to love and to dialogue with people who believe in and practice the great human/Christian values

of social justice, freedom, solidarity, peace, etc., basing this on the fullest respect toward those with no particular religious affiliation ...

e) to dialogue with modern day culture and its human realities.

From this specific goal you can glimpse the greatness of the charism of unity that God gave to Chiara for the Church and the world. It is described in the Statutes for all time.

Could you tell us more about Part seven, which concerns those belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and ecumenism?

Elfriede Glaubitz: Let's look at Part Seven which has a long heading: Guidelines for Persons of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities Belonging to the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement).

For me, the first part of this title doesn't sound very pleasant because it speaks of how to behave towards people of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities: it could give the impression that the Catholics ought to have a certain attitude towards our non-Catholics; and consequently our people from the various Churches appear not to be integrated into the Movement. The second part of the title, however, contains the clear affirmation that people from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities belong to and are part of the Movement. It is a reality that is lived in our focolares, in the nuclei and in all the various vocations and branches of the Movement. It is part of our life and is already expressed in Article 1 of the Statutes. We read there:

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.

What follows is a reference to both Article 20 and Articles 141-145 of Part Seven of the Statutes. The second paragraph of Article 20 states that both in the Statutes and in the various regulations of the branches and other parts of the movement, there are guidelines for conduct, norms and directives of the Catholic Church to be observed concerning ecumenism.

We know that during the drafting of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the preparatory commission had envisaged a new canon allowing non-Catholic Christians to be members of Catholic associations. But this proposal was not accepted in the current Code. Despite this, Chiara always affirmed in her writings, talks and meetings that those belonging to other Churches are members of the Work of Mary. Every time there was a revision of the Statutes, Chiara made many proposals and many attempts, together with Fr Foresi, Antonio, Lionello, Opus and Emmaus, to express this reality in a juridical way. Unfortunately, they could not be implemented because the legislation of the Code of Canon Law does not provide for it. What remains is Chiara's strong desire and her intention that all those belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities should also be juridically considered members of the Work of Mary.

In what way do these brothers and sisters of ours belong to the Movement?

Elfriede Glaubitz: Meanwhile, after a long discernment, in our current Statutes members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are now called "aggregates". We read in Article 16 of the Statutes: *'they may be part of the work of Mary as "aggregates"'. They "desire to be part of the Work of Mary or of one of its various ramifications" and "feel attracted to the Focolare Movement and to its spirituality (and) share in its spirit" (Art. 142).* What does the term aggregate mean? It means to be associated, to belong to the same flock, to the same people. We all know that the translation of this term aggregate or aggregates, especially in German, English and other languages, is difficult and unattractive. The expression aggregates even hurts and wounds, because it gives the impression of not fully belonging to the Movement even though we have and live the same vocation. It is precisely love for Jesus Forsaken that draws Catholics and those belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial

Communities "to work together to overcome every possible disunity within the Work of Mary, within their own respective Church or ecclesial Community and among all Christians" (Art. 9).

And, experiencing that we are true sisters and brothers in the one Church of Christ, the entire Movement is committed to establishing relationships of fraternal communion and common witness with Christians belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, with a view to re-establishing full and visible communion (see articles 6b and 144).

All this is part of the specific goal of the Movement (cf. Art. 6). In articles 141-144 this aim is taken up again and re-emphasized that the Work of Mary commits, with all Christians belonging to the Movement, to take part in the ecumenical initiatives of the Catholic Church and - in unity with the competent Catholic ecclesial authority - in those promoted by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities (cf. art. 141). Article 144 says that all Christians belonging to the Movement contribute together "to the re-establishment of the full and visible communion among the Churches": that is, to conversion of heart, holiness of life, the witness of mutual love, the so-called dialogue of life or of the people, with various kinds of congresses, such as the recent Ecumenical Conference in March 2025 at Castelgandolfo, as well as with formation and study, and finally with prayer (cf. Art. 144), being a "life-giving presence within their own Churches or ecclesial Communities" (Art. 143). These words full of meaning are all quotations from the Statutes!

At the end of part seven is Article 145, which has great importance and relevance in the present reality of the Movement. Let us read it together: *"The opinion of members of other Christian Churches and ecclesial Communities is to be sought whenever necessary, in the most appropriate ways, in order to be mindful of the thoughts and the praxis of their respective Churches and Communities."* This Article underlines and requests the opinion of members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, of non-Catholic Christians, whenever necessary. This means that the opinion of our Christian sisters and brothers must be sought before making a decision in this regard.

How is this clear requirement of the Statutes implemented? This is done first of all in the zones, in the council of the zonetta and the zone (cf. Art. 124). It is also implemented at meetings of the General Council of the Movement, the President having recently invited two members of other Churches to attend for this purpose. It is also written in the Statutes that the President can invite aggregates and collaborators to the General Assembly of the Movement as observers (Article 78). This has been done for several years. In addition, there are other examples which are not mentioned in the Statutes that show how important it is to seek the opinion of our non-Catholics, such as the preparation of the comment on the Word of Life, preparation of talks, consultation for the sections and the branches, the dialogues, events, etc.

What about followers of non-Christian religions, and people with no religious affiliations?

Elfriede Glaubitz: Referring to article 78, I used the term collaborators. Who are the collaborators in our Statutes and how are they understood in the Movement? Article 16 defines collaborators as the "followers of non-Christian religions and persons with no particular religious affiliation" (see art. 21 and 22). Their opinion will also be sought "whenever necessary ... each time a decision in the Work of Mary is to be made which could, in some way, be pertinent to them" (see Articles 146 and 147). For followers of non-Christian religions (Article 21) and for people of no particular religious affiliation (Article 22) who wish to adhere to the Movement, special norms are given in these Statutes and in the regulations of the branches (Art. 146 and 147).

Article 147 specifies our way of relating to people of no particular religious affiliation. This article names many values that are of enormous relevance in today's challenging world. I quote:

In dealing with them, the greatest possible respect must be shown towards the values of their own conscience, insofar as it is illuminated by the human values instilled in every person, and so that their

relationships with Christians and with the followers of various religions will in turn be marked by the same attention and respect.

So as to give witness to the unity of the human family, such relationships will be characterized by harmony and fraternity among believers and nonbelievers for the betterment of humanity. This is to be expressed through shared initiatives of solidarity on behalf of individuals or peoples suffering from various forms of poverty, injustice, war, exploitation and illness.

I like this article a lot, because it beautifully describes everything that is lacking in today's society, and what we can give to humanity by living the Ideal.

The last paragraph of Article 147 concerning people with no particular religious affiliation reads: *The Movement will be guided in all these relationships by the norms of the living Magisterium of the Catholic Church. (Art. 147).* This shows how this dialogue is lived in unity with the Church, and this article acts as a bridge connecting us to the last part of the Statutes.

Why is there still a chapter that deals specifically with the relationship with church authorities?

Elfriede Glaubitz: To understand part ten, you have to broaden your view to include all the articles in the Statutes, from the beginning to the end, right to the final articles. We have already said that the Movement is a private association, endowed with legal personality, in accordance with canons 298-311 and 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law, constituted according to the norms of the Catholic Church, and these General Statutes are approved by the Holy See (as in Article 1). We are recognised by the Catholic Church, which regarding our Movement, has the task of overseeing, caring for and preserving Chiara's charism. We know how much Chiara loved the Church, even in her time of trial she always acted in conformity with the directives of the Catholic Church, to the Magisterium of the Pope and the bishops. She wrote many reports to them concerning the specific goal of the Movement.

That is why in part ten the Statutes invite us and require us to be in close contact with the competent Church authorities. The Centre of the Movement follows and looks after of our relationship with the Holy See, i.e. in the first instance with the Pope, the Dicastery for the Family, Laity and Life, and according to need, with other Dicasteries, such as the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity or for Bishops. It is up to the President to represent and maintain a relationship with the Holy See according to Articles 148 and 149.

There is a description of who is responsible for relationships with the Holy See (Article. 150) and/or the dioceses (Article 151) and how they work together. The President, the Centre of the Movement, the zone delegates of the Movement maintain this relationship with the competent ecclesiastical authorities.

The final note of the Statutes briefly recounts the history of the various stages of approval of the Work of Mary, which Lucia Abignente presented in the third UPM lesson.

What would you wish for our future?

Cristiane Ganda Ribeiro: At the conclusion of this course, I hope that we will be able to look with new eyes at our mission in the Movement and ask ourselves if what is written in the Statutes is being enacted through us, in the place where we find ourselves. If the answer is yes, it means that the charism continues to be alive, that we are responding to our vocation. Because, as we have seen, the Statutes bear witness to a divine reality, which must be understood and lived in space and time by all of us.

And I conclude with this invitation: let us read the Statutes with total openness, in order to incarnate them, being able to grasp the charismatic aspect even in those parts that are more strictly juridical.

I hope that, through the Statutes, we can see our complexity, diversity and beauty as a special gift from God. It will be good to read them together, in our groups, asking God for the wisdom to understand the Work of Mary not only on an organisational or institutional level, but in its design, in order to joyfully implement our mission in the local communities and, above all, our own personal commitment to unity.

Do you have a final word?

Raphael Takougang: I conclude with the words of Chiara Lubich; in response to the question of why she tirelessly read and meditated on the Statutes, she said: *"I do it for two reasons: first because of the gift of a prophetic Holy Spirit; and secondly, I do it because from the Heavenly Mariapolis I want to look down and see everyone reading the Statutes and the Regulations."* These are Chiara's words. Don't forget: the Statutes are a valuable tool, but love and unity must guide our actions, including the reading of the Statutes. I remind you of the premise of every rule.

Let us ask ourselves: how can I, in my daily life, contribute to this big family? Perhaps by living my specific role with more awareness, perhaps by deepening my knowledge of the Statutes, perhaps again by sharing with others this vision of unity in diversity. Thank you.

Can you give us a final word...

Elfriede Glaubitz: In my opinion it is really worth reading the Statutes to get to know the Movement better, as recognised by the Catholic Church, and to see the greatness of the Charism and its effectiveness, radiating in the Church and the world today.