



TRACES

litterae communionis

Communion and Liberation  
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04

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**“I come  
with you”**

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## TRACES

Communion and Liberation International Magazine  
Vol. 24

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# n° 04

## August 2022



A concert for Ukraine organized by CL university students in Milan, Italy.

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*"How will it be to be touched by Being!"*

## communion and liberation

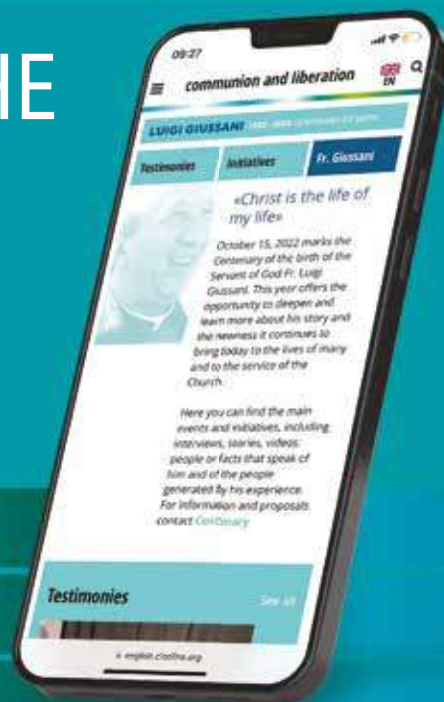
# THE NEW SECTION ON THE GIUSSANI CENTENARY IS NOW ONLINE

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#100Testimonies

#100Giussani



## Room for breathing freely

“**T**hey’re the most alive thing I’ve ever encountered,” says Luis from Puerto Rico, speaking of friends he’d met at his university. This issue offers the testimonies of university students in various parts of the world who are reliving “the origin of Christianity, two thousand years later,” as they recount. This life in them emerges in their relationship with classmates, in facing an exam, when they are involved in student elections or in judging what is happening in the world. They learn to look at themselves and others with the same esteem they have received, and are a presence simply by living. Now that the academic year has ended, the classrooms have emptied, and vacation time is beginning, it is the same commitment as ever, the most important of them all, to life and one’s own humanity. For this reason, we want to introduce this issue with a passage from “The Time of Freedom,” notes from Fr. Giussani’s words on vacation, the full text of which you can find at [clonline.org](http://clonline.org).

**“I understand what a person (young or adult) truly wants** not from his work or studies, which he has to do out of social pressure or necessity, but from how he uses his free time. If a young person or an adult wastes his free time, he does not love life; he is a fool. Vacation is in fact the classic time when almost everybody becomes a fool. On the contrary, vacation time is the noblest time of the year, because it is the moment when one becomes as involved as he likes in the value he recognizes as dominant for his life, or he doesn’t get involved in anything at all, and then he is, as I said, a fool... Man’s highest value, his virtue, courage, energy, what makes life worth living, lies in gratuitousness, in his capacity for gratuitousness. And it is in free time that gratuitousness truly comes out and affirms itself in an amazing way. The way one prays, one’s faithfulness to prayer, the truth of one’s relationships, one’s self-dedication, enthusiasm, humble approach to reality, emotional involvement and compassion toward things, all this is much more evident during vacation than during the year. On vacation one is free, and if he is free, he does what he wants.

This means that vacation is important. First of all, it demands attention in the choice of companions and place, but above all it concerns the way one lives: if vacation never reminds you of what you should remember more often, if it doesn’t make you better toward others, but makes you respond more to instinct than to reason, if it doesn’t teach you to look at nature with profound intention, if it doesn’t make you make sacrifices joyfully, then your time of rest has not achieved its purpose. Vacation should be as free as possible. The criterion of vacation time is to have some breathing room and, if possible, room for breathing deeply.”

## Mariko, Ombretta, Ezio

edited by  
**Paola Bergamini**  
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### Japan, the Encounter, and the Journey

When I was in high school, I happened to find a Bible in my grandmother's house. I read the book of Genesis and became interested in the existence of God, the creator of this world. Then a Catholic friend brought me to church. The parish priest was Fr. Alberto Berra, a missionary from PIME who participates in the movement of CL. There I learned about the existence of Christ. The first time I participated in a meeting of CL was in my third year of high school when I was preparing for the sacrament of baptism. In that meeting, I met two other friends from the movement, Sako and Fr. Arnaldo. I didn't know anything about CL, nor about Fr. Giussani. I was baptized after my high school graduation and I moved to Kyoto for college. During the summer of my freshman year, I went to the CL Exercises for the first time. I didn't understand what the movement was or who Fr. Giussani was, but I felt a strong attraction to something present and asked myself why I was there. After graduation, I went to Tokyo to continue my studies, and there I met other people from CL. Every Sunday after Mass, there was School of Community on *The Religious Sense*. The Japanese version wasn't yet available, so we read it piece by piece, translating as we went. The content was difficult, but I was struck by what was at its roots and by the passion and attitude of those friends. I wanted to be with them. When I started working, I became ill, and I despaired because it seemed like my life was over. I couldn't control my emotions, my feelings... I only thought about how I could escape from that suffering. I moved away from the church and from CL. Still, I

couldn't forget the existence of the community, of Sako and Marcia. And in my heart, I always shouted at Christ and questioned Him. The turning point came when I moved to Hiroshima with my husband. I called Sako and she immediately invited me to a CL event. I found the courage to go and I found many faces I had missed. I clearly remember that moment. It was the moment in which the existence of Christ and of the community became one. Since then, I have always participated in the School of Community with a desire to deepen my faith life. Another turning point was when we moved to Fukuoka, 282 kilometers from Hiroshima, for my husband's job. And then the pandemic broke out. I felt so alone, but I knew what I needed to do. I had a place where I felt more myself and that was necessary for living: School of Community and the presence of friends from the community. I wanted to participate, even from a distance. And in a meeting with the community with Fr. Carrón on Zoom, I experienced clearly the charism of Fr. Giussani, of the presence of Christ and of God. It was a clear sign for me that I should continue living with CL. It took a long time for me to reach this certainty. Little by little, I have learned to accept my weakness and to accept myself as I am. This has been made possible not by my own efforts, but by the presence of Christ, who is always alive in me, and by the journey I've made with friends from CL. Everything that God has given me was necessary for me to live. I decided to enroll in the Fraternity because I want to follow Christ more than ever and to live with CL, in CL. I need the charism of Fr. Giussani, the words of Fr. Carrón that have brought me this far, and the presence of the friends of the community who support me.

**Mariko**, Fukuoka (Japan)

### At the Convention

I was in New Orleans for work, at an international convention on tumors. I left home with my head full



of so many thoughts and worries. After a few days of work meetings and talks with professors from American universities, I saw in the distance a figure that seemed familiar. I recognized my former boss from Paris during my doctoral work, whom I hadn't seen for about twenty years. He was a Frenchman, born in Tunisia, of Muslim origin, but who identified himself as an atheist. As soon as he saw me, he recognized me and was moved. He was there with his wife who is also a scientist, and he told me that he had retired but that he continued to work as a professor emeritus. He also wanted to hear about me, so we set a time to meet the following day. We had lunch together and didn't talk about science at all and I realized that before me was a man who had changed over these many years and who was struggling with the meaning of life. I asked him questions about the other students who had been in the doctoral program with me and he began to tell me very dramatic stories of depressions, a suicide, so much suffering... Then he told me that his brother had died of COVID. At a certain point, he asked me, "But where do you find hope? I am in such need of some!" I responded that only God gives hope... and he replied, "You see, I believe in God because reality, as it has been created, is beautiful. When you are a scientist, you see how everything has order, whether with a microscope or macroscope. It can't be random, but only from God. But I cannot practice. In the Muslim religion, there are so many practices... there's no time!" This opened a beautiful discussion about what's important in life: he has spent his whole life for his career and now that he's retired, everything's finished... We talked for two hours and we promised to meet each other the next day to continue our conversation, but work got in the way. That evening he wrote me an email: "Dear Ombretta, I was so happy to see you. You deserve all the success you have at work. I'm proud of you. You are a transparent and serious person because the love of God is upon you! Let's talk soon and come and visit us in Paris." After this meeting with him, I was full of joy, and all my worries had vanished. I understood that "the glory of God is the man alive," because the glory of God "is the man in joy." In this world there is so much desperation and at the same time such thirst for hope, and I'm always so distracted and wrapped up in my thoughts that, most of the time, I live without realizing that I have upon me this love from God. In order to notice it, I needed a nonpracticing Muslim! This awareness of who I am, of His faithfulness toward me, of Who always loves me and Who reminds me of this love by making Himself visible as He wishes, is the freshness of life!

**Ombretta**, Washington, D.C. (USA)

## "Each Day of His Life"

"Lorenzo wants to ask you something," Elena said, as she looked at her four-month-old baby I was holding in my arms. "What is it, Elena?" I asked, curious about this original request. "Lorenzo wants you to be his godfather for his baptism." My heart skipped a beat and then I found myself again in front of a simple, humble gaze that made me immediately say, "But I'm a little old man and I'm not worthy of this preference." "You have been such a help to us in these twelve years of waiting for a child, helping us to live with openness and accompanying us with faithfulness." To my surprise, out of my mouth came a yes, spontaneous and complete, not mine, to their proposal; I was "grasped" in that instant by an event of truth and of familiarity with the mystery who repropose Himself to my life. Davide, approaching the age of fifty, and Elena who is older than forty, live the grace of their first child with the same devotion with which two other parents must have welcomed their small baby, Jesus; in a way that is pure, grateful, and aware of the gift given to them by the mystery, Who literally came to "visit" their lives. And without a doubt, they were aware of this grace that together we had asked for so many times of Our Lady of the Flowers, the protector of pregnant women, at the sanctuary in Bra. Ours is an ordinary friendship that solidified in these years through the gesture of School of Community and in moments of simple sharing and friendship. Our friendship has intensified thanks to the shared and patient journey of a request, of imploring the Lord not to forget to answer their desire to become parents. Elena and Davide composed this prayer: "Oh, Lord, we entrust to You and to our Blessed Virgin of Grace our small Lorenzo who today receives the sacrament of baptism. Help him to grow according to Christian values, to have faith in You, and to be loyal and honest. Protect him by remaining always at his side in happy and carefree moments, and by giving him comfort and support in adversity. Grant that Lorenzo might meet You every day of his life, in a gesture, a face, an event, so that he might understand how great is Your Love." I asked Elena about the source of this prayer. She answered, "I wrote it thinking about what Davide and I have found in the movement: friendship and affection that bind us together, along with the shared desire to know Him. I hope that it will be like this for Lorenzo."

**Ezio**, Cuneo (Italy)

# Close-up

© Giovanni Dinarolo



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In these pages,  
some shots from  
the life of CL university  
students in Milan, Italy.

**I**n a corridor of the State University of Milan, a girl who is campaigning for another list stops Giovanni. “Why are you guys always happy? I have half an idea of joining you next year,” she says, partly teasing and partly serious. It’s election time at the university, and Giovanni mulls over this friend’s question. The answer, valid for him and for her, is right there in front of his eyes, in the faces of many friends who during these intense weeks of campaigning have testified to a fullness of life that excludes nothing, not even politics. Their faces express a passion for reality, without a concern for the outcome, and with open curiosity about those they meet in the classroom or at the campaign stands, even with all the limitations, the anger, and the mistakes, as well as the hostility and dirty tricks they have had to deal with. Nothing is taken for granted.

Listening to the stories of the young people in those days of election campaigning brings to mind the words of Giussani to university students in



# What we have won

*Kaouthar, Marta, Ben, and others.  
The encounters experienced by young  
people active in university elections.  
What was at stake for them?*



**Paola Bergamini**

1976: “First of all, what needs to happen is not a ‘presence of our community’ at the university, but a ‘new heart in each of us,’ your own maturity, brother; the explosion or the dawn of your Christian maturity, of a new faith and passion. What interests us is this humanity that is already alive in some of us and that cannot help but pass on to others.” We will try to report some stories that document this gusto for life that can make someone say, “I’m joining you.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t help you.” This is the umpteenth rejection that Ben, a student at the University of Bologna, has gotten in preparing for the election campaign he is heading. He cannot do it alone; this is obvious, but he wonders whether he is mistaken in his “strategy,” or that “his” proposal is less than fascinating. He keeps his doubts to himself for a few days, but then begins talking about it with some friends. Davide tells him, “You can’t think of doing all this and forget the faces through whom you encountered Christ—those who help you to remember.” Ben thinks to himself that “I don’t need this right now.” That afternoon, he meets one of the leaders of the other electoral list. They have become friends and Ben knows him well. He notices that

the friend has lost weight and looks run-down. “What’s going on with you?” “I’m exhausted. I can’t wait for the elections to be over.” Ben remembers Davide’s words, which at the time had irritated him, but he tells his friend, “Look, you can’t give everything for the things you do without returning to the people who love you and who you love.”

**This episode sheds** some light on things. The disappointment gives way to Ben’s prayer that he be able to see the living presence of Christ happen again. Ben sets aside his demands and strategies and asks Pietro to give him a hand. Watching Pietro in action, Ben sees a friend who has grown and been changed by an encounter with Christ. Along with





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Pietro, other friends get involved. The days of the elections are filled with emotional ups and downs, but Ben has one thing clearly in mind: for five months he has insisted that “we have to give ourselves reasons and understand for Whom we are doing things,” but this is a bit abstract, and once again some faces were placed in front of him to look at so that he could rediscover Him. If all that effort is not for something big, it is useless. Above all, what can he say to counter the avalanche of insults he receives? That Objective Students is not the same as CL, that it is a list open to everyone, that people of every background, faith, and conviction participate? He doesn’t care about getting involved in a conversation so he can give answers that are right but basically pre-packaged. He has only one desire: that others encounter the experience of fullness that he has. He is certain that even their anger expresses a request, a question. The election outcome falls short of his expectations. After the vote count, Ben experiences a moment of despondency, but soon

afterwards says to his friends, “Let’s go to dinner and celebrate!” At the restaurant he looks at them sitting there at the table. “They have all been a sign of a greater measure, a sign of Christ entering my life: Pietro in one way, Matteo in another, Pisu in still another. Nobody can take this away from me.” The exam period begins and “normal” life resumes. One evening Ben tells his girlfriend, “I’ve come away from these days fonder of the encounter I’ve had. And I’m curious to see how this greater measure will continue to enter my life.”

**Just a few hours** are left before the mega-party in Piazza Leonardo da Vinci, Milan, organized by one of the lists for the elections. The sun is beating down, and a girl comes to the partly empty stand of Objective Students. With an annoyed tone she asks, “Have you got a gazebo to lend us?” Those at the stand, who had been eating sandwiches and joking among themselves, stop. Marta is tempted to respond, “You have a lot of nerve, after all you said about us.”

But instead, she says, “Come with me to get the gazebo.” As they walk, observing her, Marta thinks, “You’ve organized the most spectacular event, with a stage and music and stuff, and you’re here to talk trash about everyone and everything.” Marta asks her, “Are you happy about what you’re doing?” The girl keeps her mouth shut. The days are very busy, and Marta is happy with how everyone is working with passion. She thinks, “We’ll probably lose the elections, but I’ve already won in life.” The last day of voting they are attacked viciously and unjustly. Marta is called, together with the representatives of the other lists. She is pained at the false accusations aimed at them. She begins to wonder, “Does what we say hold up even in front of this injustice, this lie? Who am I following?” After the meeting, she sees Shelly, a leader of the community, who is also aware of the situation. Shelly tells Marta, “I was very upset too, but at a certain point I went to church and prayed a rosary for them.” This is the answer, but Marta never would have thought of praying for those “enemies.” A few days later, a leader of a leftist list who was not directly involved in the episode asks her to tell him what happened. At a certain point, though, he is the one to tell a story. “In the 2019 elections I really insulted one of you. I said, ‘You CL people are the evil of the world. Get out of this university!’ All the guy said in response was, ‘Come and meet us.’ Three years later, today I can say that in working with you, I’ve seen that you have something different in your way of doing things. When people attack you I say, ‘Read the records, look at the posts, the people who really work here are those folks.’” Marta knows well that this friend has not changed his political vision; he has the same position on income, merit, etc., but he has sim-



ply opened his eyes by looking at the facts and spending time with them. One evening, Marta tells a friend, “If only for one person, I’ll continue doing what I’m doing at the university; if only for one person out of a hundred who hate us.”

**Sitting in a café,** Teresa and Costanza are waiting for a friend they met during the election campaign at the Catholic University in Milan. Over a salad and a coffee they talk about exams, then Teresa speaks about her experience as a student representative during her undergraduate years at another university. “I wanted to change the world and the university but nothing happened. I’m disappointed about the indifference of people and the university world.” Costanza, instead, has had a very different experience as a student representative during these years. “I understand. I think that it’s still worthwhile to be active.” Teresa replied that “I sense that for you it’s different, otherwise I wouldn’t vote for you all, I’m telling you openly. What happened to you?” And Costanza continued: “I have to take a step back in my story. My parents were always involved in politics, both in high school and at the university. Let’s say we were very one-sided. They told me over and over that if you belong to a group this means not speaking to the others anymore.” “But you’re not this way!” Teresa interrupted. “You’re right. Exactly this contrast with what they transmitted to me makes it more evident for me that the Christian proposal is exceptional, that it’s based on an encounter and opens you up to the affirmation of the other. If I reasoned according to groups or factions I wouldn’t have met you. I would’ve lost this opportunity for friendship.”

A few days later, with the electoral campaign in full-swing, Costanza



and Teresa stop another girl. After ten minutes of conversation it is no longer about tuition, exams, or programs of study, and they spend over an hour talking in the cloister. “Give me a call on your cell phone, so I can save your number. Then let’s keep in touch,” the girl tells Costanza. A few hours later the girl sends Costanza a message: “You are the only two people with whom I’ve reached such a personal level of conversation. I usually prefer to be quiet and I forget I have my own thoughts.”

**At the entrance** to the State University of Milan, all of the students want to receive a flyer from Kaouthar. She is not a candidate but it is natural for her to do this: these students are her friends. A student from a left-wing list comes up to her and asks “Why are you, a Muslim, with Objective Students?” “What do you mean?” she asks him in turn. “Well, come on, they’re all members of CL, aren’t they!?” Kaouthar does not sense a hostile or polemical intent and decides to tell him her story instead of giving theoretical explanations, in part because she understands that

he knows more about the Movement than she does. “I met CL in 2019 at the stands for study groups. Or, to be precise, I met people with first names and last names. They weren’t better than the others, but they had a ‘winning’ gaze, in the sense that it embraced all of me. This had never happened to me before. And do you know the most interesting thing? In these three years, this experience has happened again every day; it’s what makes me wake up in the morning and want to encounter others. I want that ‘winning’ gaze. This is why I’m here handing out flyers—so I can act in accord with this story of goodness.” Kaouthar once told a friend in Objective Students, “In a few days the election campaign will be over and we’ll know whether we’ve won or lost. But this isn’t the most important thing. I’ve realized that something more important than a simple victory is at stake. There’s the experience of friendship with you in these years, a gift that’s renewed in every relationship, even if it’s not in the form I have in mind. I can’t forget this ‘thing’ and I don’t want to lose it.” ■

## Taiwan

# The question is burning

*A brief dialogue with the young people who meet weekly to do the School of Community at FuJen University. Many of them are not Catholic. “But that ‘mystery of living’ Leopardi speaks about interests us.”*



Paolo Perego

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“I grew up thinking that the church was just a building where Christians go on Sundays to spend time together. But here, with these friends, I’ve discovered that it’s actually a place where everyone can share his life. The church lives. It’s the continuity of the life of Jesus who died and rose again.” Timoteo is a Protestant. He chose his “Western” name, as is customary here, when he started studying Italian at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the FuJen Catholic University in Taipei, Taiwan. He’s in his third year and for the past two, every Thursday he meets with this small group of friends, accompanied by Father Paolo Costa, from Imola, a San Carlo missionary on the island and their Italian teacher. They’re about twenty young people

in total, many of them not even Catholic, who meet every week for the School of Community. “The theme is life,” they recount—“what happens to us, what is close to our hearts,” such as studying, relationships with their parents, choosing a job. They were supposed to present the exhibition on Fr. Giussani’s *Why the Church?*—which will be discussed in these pages—at the FuJen University, organized by the Taiwanese CL community. Then the pandemic turned their plans upside down. But it’s still interesting to look at these young people: born and raised in a country where the Catholic faith is interesting to less than 1 percent of the population—why would they want to tell their peers about the church and Fr. Giussani’s thought? You only have to listen to what they experience together, their “special

friendship,” as fourth-year student Ada calls it, to realize that they are, in some way, living the church firsthand. Immacolata, for example, a veteran of the group, was struck by Leopardi while reading the School







of Community: “My father is baptized, I am a nonbeliever. But that ‘mystery of living’ Leopardi speaks about—how does one live it? It’s a question that is always kept burning within this friendship. And it interests us.” Even when they do charitable work, Timoteo adds, spending time with the elderly or in poorer rural areas, “seen from the outside it looks like we are just there to help people, but the truth is that we receive much more than we give. I am learning

Young people at the Shrine of Our Lady in Wufengqi, Taiwan.



that what the heart desires and what satisfies it is love, not wealth... In other words, when I am with these friends I feel at peace. That's why I spend time with them." This peace, they tell you, is not to be taken for granted. Loneliness is a reality, sometimes resulting in depression, as happened to a friend who took her own life a few months ago. And it's not easy to confide in someone, as Allegra, now a college graduate who received baptism at the Easter vigil, says: "It's hard to share what you're living deep inside with people; it's hard to explain it to others—you're afraid you'll seem strange, that they won't understand. But the things we tell each other here are true. It's about our lives. We don't force ourselves to talk about Jesus just because we are a Catholic group—we do so by talking about ourselves. It's through us that He can be talked about."

**Catholic or not**, "everyone has the same heart," says Father Paolo. "Everyone has a desire to share life with others," urges Bonaventure—yes, that's his baptismal name—who will be the next to graduate: "We join groups of various kinds, but it's hard to find someone with whom to explore the depths of important things. When I came to FuJen I started attending some Catholic groups. They talked about the Bible a lot, but little about life. Then, because of an invitation, I ended up at the School of Community. It's been four years and I'm still here." That's what happened to Bernardo, Nicholas, Karl, Pauline... "I mean, are you interested in becoming men and women," we say, looking at them. "Very much so!" Giorno exclaims as he jumps up; he took his name from a Japanese comic strip he loves. Until then he has listened in silence, but now he doesn't hold back, "Becoming men. Life is difficult, full of problems. How can you deal with them? How do you find satisfaction in everything you do? I'm here because I am interested in these questions." ■

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# The great unexpected



Donato Contuzzi

*The extensive work to present the translation of Why the Church? Then their plans were turned upside down. And the amazement in seeing that it is not a book that is at the center of things, but a life in action.*

**W**e have been working on the translation of the first Chinese edition of Father Giussani's *Why the Church?* for about two years, and had organized a

public presentation of it in Taipei, at the FuJen Catholic University. Translation, proofreading, choosing the book cover, printing, distribution... Everything was going well. Religious,

political, and academic authorities planned to attend the public event, as well as many friends. As with the previous two PerCorso volumes, we also decided to organize an exhi-



A guided tour of the exhibition on *Why the Church?* by Fr. Giussani.

hibition at the university, serving as a springboard and slowly taking shape from the contents of the text and the author's life in the year of the centenary of his birth. Here, as Chinese culture dictates, the centenaries of the dead are celebrated, often outdoors, with large feasts, as a sign of respect for ancestors. Ning, a close friend of ours, designed the exhibition together with some of us. She wanted it to be an introduction to the book and to Father Giussani but starting from us, from our life as a community, as a church. The heart of the work then focuses on three questions, "What is the church? Where is the church? Why does the church exist?" Some of us tried to engage with these questions, and our answers have become part of the exhibition. There are also panels that speak of what the church is, how it came into being and what its basic features are. Here the church is so young and unknown that it's not at all taken for granted that we know what it is. We priests are often asked questions like this: Is the church an association? Is it one or is it many? Does one need a membership card? Do you worship God or Our Lady? Can priests get married or have girlfriends?

For the exhibition, we printed Giussani's most beloved words, which became a small dictionary that could be consulted by visitors: "communion," "love," "peace," "poverty," "Holy Spirit"... And then Father Giussani is also "present" in two videos with Chinese subtitles, where he talks about Mary and Peter's yes. We set the exhibition up in the lobby of the Faculty of Languages, where the book will be presented. Some CLU students, almost all non-Catholics, present it to classmates and professors. Watching them, I asked myself many times why they do this, and answered that the only reason is a belonging and appreciation for the experience they have every Thursday night when we do School of Community; that is, because of a bond. I am reminded of the words of St. Augustine when he says that the boundaries of the church are not clear and it is not easy to determine who is in and who is out.

**The date of the event was approaching** and everything seemed to be going well. But then the unexpected came: the government changed its policy with respect to the COVID emergency from "zero cases" to "living with the

Ning and, below, a panel from the exhibition.



想像耶穌的目光  
Imagine how Jesus looks at us

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virus.” After that, several months behind the rest of the world, COVID exploded in Taiwan as well. Cases increased like never before, some online classes began, people were afraid to go out. Everything became complicated. And just days before the event, the university decided to stop all in-person classes and suspended campus access. Everything needed to be rethought.

We decided to do the book presentation online, but the exhibition could no longer be done at the university. We decided to move it to the parish, repurposing the panels and location to offer the possibility of visiting it in person. Ning sorted out the details, Kunli got hold of a small truck, and some students living on campus offered to help out. On the morning of the 14th, the exhibition opened.

**The day the online book presentation** took place, led by Liao Xinci Allegra, a friend of ours baptized at Easter with seventy-five people connected online. The first greeting came from the Chargé d’Affaires ad interim, Monsignor Pavol Talapka (the apostolic nuncio), who began by saying, “On this occasion, I would like to recall the

mandate that, in September 1984, St. John Paul II gave to CL on the occasion of the audience for the thirtieth anniversary of the movement: ‘Go into all the world to bring the truth, beauty and peace that are encountered in Christ the Redeemer.’ I am happy to see that this mandate has also been fulfilled here in Taiwan.”

The representative of the Italian Economic, Commercial, and Cultural Promotion Office in Taipei, Davide Giglio (the de facto consul), elaborated on this: “Father Giussani is an extraordinary and important figure. His work has contributed in a decisive way to reawakening the love for Christ in young people by seeing in Him the way to fulfill the deepest desires of the human heart. We need to look at his person not with a backward gaze, but with a forward one. Indeed, Father Giussani’s life and activity have generated a stream that is always renewing itself and offering new fruit. This year will certainly be an opportunity to deepen the teaching of Father Giussani and the method of life that he taught and brought to the world with his very existence.”

**After more greetings** from academic authorities and a brief introduction from me, it was the turn of the speakers. The first was Professor Chen Fangzhong, dean of the Faculty of Literature and History at FuJen and an expert in church history, who elucidated on the most pertinent contents of the text and pointed out how “ingenious Father Giussani’s approach is.” He added: “We need to keep in mind the difference in cultural background between Father Giussani and the Taiwanese reader. A lot of work needs to be done to translate Giussani’s point of view into terms understandable to us Easterners.” The second speaker was Sonia Huang Meiting, director of the Center for Chinese Studies in FuJen, a member of the Focolare movement: “In Taiwan, quite a few believers were bap-





tized as adults and most of them were immersed in the environment of so-called popular beliefs for the first half of their lives. An immersive Christian environment also includes sharing within the family, which is not easy for most Taiwanese people. On this point, I would like to further explore the explanations and direction that the charism can give.” When we offered her a small fee for the talk, she declined it, asking us to donate it to the movement because “I am really grateful to have been able to read and meet Father Giussani.”

**Finally, Davide Prosperi**, president of the Fraternity of CL, in the video he sent to us, began by saying: “This is an extraordinary event. It is a demanding but exciting goal

to think of transferring the words and experiences of Giussani, a man of Christian Europe, into the language and experience of this great people, of this very rich culture. Giussani is proudly aware that he has been seized and therefore that he is the bearer of an event destined to speak to people all over the world. This is the reason behind the cultural and religious enterprise we are presenting.”

To the question of where to meet Christ today, Prosperi recounted the episode of Saint Paul in Athens when he announced to the Athenians who that “unknown god” was, to whom one of the altars was dedicated: “How do we understand that it is not all a scam, a fairy tale? Jesus promises that by living with those He has sent, our lives change for the

better. We become more capable of loving, of understanding the truth, of fighting for justice. Our lives become better. We remain fragile beings who make mistakes, even serious ones. Yet something new and inexplicable happens in us and in those whom Jesus has chosen. This is the life of the church.”

After the break, Ning talks about the exhibition, its significance and how it came about, inviting everyone to visit it. Personally, I am filled with gratitude because we did not just experience the presentation of a book about the church, but of the church itself in action, its life, the life of Christ in us. This is the “big unexpected” that small unforeseen events exalt and reveal to us. And we are the first to be amazed by it. ■

*Close-up*

# **Puerto Rico**



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## ***And now?***

“I cannot stay away from the most alive thing that I have ever encountered.” Two university students from Puerto Rico talk about their experience as they finish up their studies.



Luis Daniel and Fabiola.

**A**t present, my university life is virtually nonexistent. For some time, most of my interactions have been online, and during the past year, I have only set foot on campus a couple of times. But I still cannot forget my experience in the CLU in the previous years, years full of aspirations for my life and for my future career.

I have found a job in the pharmaceutical industry, which is not the field in which I studied. I am pursuing a master's degree, but not at the university where I met the movement. However, I have decided to continue to go to

the School of Community with my old friends in the CLU even though I graduated from that university two years ago.

I cannot stay away from them because they are the most alive thing I have encountered in my life. They have always welcomed me with a humility that has exceeded logical boundaries, and also with esteem, even with all my defects. I tend to close myself off, but they always managed to help me come out of my shell, causing me to discover many things about myself. For example, I realized I had been looking at things in a moralistic way. I had always believed that everything needed to be done according to a strict moral code and I often found myself acting out of a sense of duty because I thought it was the right thing to do. But I was never happy, because Christ has called us to something much greater. It did not really dawn on me until my girlfriend and I broke up. I was convinced that I had done everything “perfectly” in that relationship and I was full of disappointment. I went to see a friend in the movement and I told him what had happened. He asked me, “Why do you want to do things well?” Initially, this question seemed ridiculous. I had never questioned that it was right to do things well, but his question made me see that my problem was that I did not have true rea-

sons for doing things well. Now that I am aware of this, my life is much simpler and I am freer.

Another significant event was the promotion I received at the pharmaceutical company. I felt somewhat worried and thought to myself, “Is this how my life will be?” I became so upset and I talked about it in the School of Community. My friends reminded me not to be afraid because we walk on paths prepared by God. I was struck by the fact that because of their unique way of getting to the heart of every circumstance, they make me not want to waste a minute of my life. I am realizing that I am starting to love everything: my family, my career, and even my own existence (my “I”). I know that I want to love and that I am loved.

**Luis Daniel**

**T**hese last few months have been very tough. During this past semester, my last semester in college, I took four courses and did an internship at an accounting firm. In addition to that, I continued in my roles as secretary of the Student Council, president of the fraternity, and as secretary of the CLU in Puerto Rico. I did all of this while trying to maintain good grades. I also experienced the loss of my paternal

grandmother... and my dog. But most of all, the closer I got to graduation, the more the question “And now?” became pressing.

In the face of all of this pressure, the most tempting response was to step down from being the secretary of the CLU and to stop going to School of Community because at a certain point the other things seemed “more important.” Later I realized that the only friends that I wanted to open up to about my suffering and my questions were those in the movement. They have been indispensable in this period. I remember how I called Fr. Tommaso on many occasions when I was distressed, and how he took the time to talk to me. In the same way, Fabrizio always checked in on me and asked me how I was doing. And there were countless other times that the companionship of my friends helped me to have faith and hope as I faced the things that were happening to me.

I grew up Protestant, and our friendship reminds me of the Father’s love for me. This helps me when I get up in the morning not to feel worried about controlling my destiny; rather, I want to say yes to what He asks of me. This companionship reminds me that however challenging circumstances may be, the Father never abandons me.

**Fabiola**





**LUIGI GIUSSANI**

1922 - 2022 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF BIRTH

# “How will it be to be touched by Being!”

Jone Echarri is the physical therapist who worked with Fr. Giussani in the most difficult moments of his illness. We offer here an extract from her testimony at the *International Days* dedicated to the founder of CL (Madrid, March 31–April 2, 2022).



**Jone Echarri**

**L**uigi Giussani is a man who was surprised, seduced, and captured forever by the event of Christ. This encounter dominated his whole life and was the reason for his entire existence: to live and bear witness to the beauty that

had called him and which he had answered so passionately. This belonging marked his whole life.

What I am most grateful for in my relationship with him is having seen with my own eyes the rare spectacle of a unified man, which

is the most important identifier of Jesus’s promise of “the hundredfold here below.” He was unified in everything, even in the most dramatic situations marked by weakness and pain, of which I’ll speak later. First, I would like to talk about some as-





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pects of his daily life that clearly show who he was and his self-awareness, because in times of illness the how and why you live become clear. Giussani began physical therapy with me thanks to a friend, Carmen Giussani, who came to my studio and saw the treatment I was using with my neurological patients. When she went to Milan, she explained to him what she had seen and suggested to him that the therapy could benefit him. A few days later Giussani called me and said, "Why don't you come and treat me for a weekend?" It was 1994.

John Paul II and Fr. Giussani  
in 1981, at Castel Gandolfo.



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The first few times I wanted him to be treated by my teacher from London, an internationally recognized professional. She did a physical therapy session with Giussani, which provided him with strong relief from his symptoms. With great naturalness, he said, "If someone can feel such a tremendous benefit when he is touched by the hand of another person, what will it be like to be touched by Being?" All of us there remained silent because his illness was already showing its harsh face, and yet he commented on "how will it be to be touched by Being"! From that day on, I wanted to know the meaning of what he said, what it meant in his daily life.

Marx said that "religion is the opium of the people." Instead, Fr. Giussani always said that religious people are those who live reality intensely, and I said, "I want to observe how you live reality intensely" because that is how you understand everything. Observing him attentively day after day, I began to see surprising things.

The first thing that struck me was the way he got up in the morning. It was moving. He got up in expectation of the events that would happen and from which he could learn, notwithstanding his advanced age. He told me, "Jone, open the window because we must understand what we have to learn today." After several days of hearing him repeat those words, one day I asked him, "What

do we have to learn?" and he answered, "That this entire day is given to us to know Him and love Him."

In this situation, I remained in silence and understood that he wanted to live reality discovering every morning not only what was happening in it, but Who was there at the foundation of reality. That "Who" is He who gives value and meaning to all things; you could perceive a personal and familiar relationship with the mystery Who made him live reality as a gift, as something given to him, to his very life, and to Whom he wanted to adhere with the heart of a child. There I understood the meaning of life as vocation in action.

**Mealtimes.** We were eating spaghetti with oil, garlic, and hot peppers, and he exclaimed, "Such goodness!" Then he reflected and said, "Although I wouldn't be able to say this if there hadn't been a Goodness at the origins. God endowed us with an ability to adhere, that is pleasure, enjoyment. That is why whoever is not educated in pleasure cannot be free." (cf. A. Savorana, *Life of Fr. Giussani*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2018, p. 1018).

The thing that most struck me was that all this happened with great spontaneity; it was evident that these considerations arose from his self-awareness, from something



Jone Echarri with her husband, Jesús Carrascosa, at Fr. Giussani's 78<sup>th</sup> birthday.

that it would be difficult for him to contain. You perceived that for Giussani, even with food there was not only us, but another Guest present, and this made him enjoy meals even more.

One morning he woke up and said to his secretary, "Gather together all those in the house." We met around his bed and he said, "We are together because you take care of my health, and this is good, but not only for this. Not because of what we do, but in order to help each other hear the voice that is within what we do. When that happens, there is a change in the air. It's like when you go to the seaside: the air you're breathing is different because the sea is there" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 1099). From that day on, I became increasingly more aware that the sea was the Lord of the universe, present there within what we were doing. The bond with such a Lord opened the doors for me to a relationship with the people tasked with taking care of Giussani, and also opened the doors of the world for me. Within those four walls I understood that what I was doing was for the good of the world, thanks to a man who testified to us that the sea was there.

#### **What he was learning from illness.**

One day, turning to me with a very intense gaze, he asked, "Do you know what I'm learning from physical therapy?" I was surprised, and he continued, "I'm learning to know the relationship between physical

therapy and morality. When Marco Bersanelli, an astrophysicist friend, speaks to me, I perceive that he is talking to me about a macrocosm. Instead, when you work on my body, I perceive a microcosm made of miniscule parts, where each one functions in perfect harmony with the others. Every part of the body acts to carry out its own function, in function of the whole. If you look at it partially, it can seem that it is only something disordered; the body is seen as something mechanical. Instead, the moral point of view of physical therapy is the order of every part, as a function of the whole. The principle of the value of the body and the spirit is identical: it is a perfect analogy with morality. It consists in the unity of the whole physical person and his consciousness. I'm looking at how I can transmit what I'm learning from physical therapy." (cf. *ibid.* p. 979).

I was amazed to see how he lived everything, even the smallest things, in relation to the ultimate reality. He was a man whose reason did not stop at appearances, but opened to the ultimate discovery that gave complete meaning to everything he lived. I had been a physical therapist for many years, and I could never have imagined in the least what he was perceiving.

One day I got up my courage and asked him a crucial question. "How can I live with the intensity you live with?" He looked at me very seriously and said, "You have to take the ini-

tiative; you have to make of your life a personal relationship with Christ; that is, you have to live a remembrance and allow Him to invade every aspect of your life. I assure you that if you live this remembrance you will have the same intensity of life that I have." I want to stress that Fr. Giussani rarely used the verb "have to," but on this occasion, to indicate the seriousness and gravity of what he was telling me, he used it with intentionality: "You have to." "Look, Jone, the poor in spirit are those who have decided, and you have to decide." That moment was a step in my life. I wanted to live the same beauty of life that I saw in him notwithstanding his illness, and to accept his challenge.

**He changed my way of working.** I am a neurological physical therapist and take care of patients who have suffered very serious problems, like paralysis of one or both body hemispheres. Some of them recover their functional abilities well and return to leading a fairly normal life. This meant enormous gratitude from them and their families, who look at me almost like a demigod. Seeing the importance my work had for people, one day Giussani asked me a radical question. "Hey, Jone, who do you think is more fortunate, you who do this work, or somebody who works eight or ten hours a day on an assembly line?" I remained silent, and he said, "I put you on the spot, didn't I? Well, the person on the as-

sembly line is more fortunate, because if he did not live a remembrance, he would shoot himself.”

For Fr. Giussani, remembrance was a matter of life and death. He wanted to say that remembrance is not an option, but a vocation; he wanted to show me that the value of work lies not only in doing but in belonging. The belonging comes before the doing. For this reason he told me, “Satisfaction in the day doesn’t begin when we start working, but a minute before, when we reflect and become aware of what has happened to us, of the event that attracted us, and only then do we become aware of ourselves.”

**Since then, before opening the door** of my studio I say to myself, “I’m entering a sacred place.” I was aware that through my remembrance He was entering that place; I could perceive clearly that His presence had to do with everything that happened at work—it was the space inside those four walls spread out to the world. This may not seem concrete at all, but for me it has become very concrete. Imagine the young people, the parents who will never again have a child like the one they had before an accident. And yet I was able to stay in front of them, to walk with them, to support their hope, because I knew that everything had been redeemed by Him who was present there. How many disappointments, how much frustration, how many sleepless nights this realization spared me.

He always reminded me, “In order to be with patients like us, to support the hope of people, you need a lot of strength, and this strength does not come from you—don’t fool yourself! Either you live the remembrance of Christ, or you will not be able to keep your gaze on the patients. In the beginning you can, but then slowly you begin to lower your eyes, then to back off, then to complain, and in the end, you lose the enthusiasm to serve the masterpiece of the Creator, which is the human person, and to work for the human glory of Christ.”

The value of the moment. He was becoming increasingly acute, his awareness ever deeper. One day he spoke about the value of the moment: “Every moment is for eternity.” I asked him, “How can I live this if, for exam-

ple, I see a person just once, or if the person I am meeting is the one I have the most difficulty with, the one who hurts me the most? It could be at work or in the family.” He said, “The person you have in front of you has your same heart and your same destiny. Destiny has been manifested to you because He loves you, but He also loves the person you meet, even if that person makes you suffer. If your gaze embraces this person with this same awareness, when you meet in heaven this person will run up to you and hug you because at a certain moment in your life you looked at her in the way Christ looks at her now.” I was very struck. It is truly necessary to keep alive a desire to be educated to looking in this way, because in doing so nothing is lost, neither the apparently banal moment of a gaze, nor the pain caused by a person. He taught me to look at people with respect, which does not mean treating them politely; it means looking at a person while thinking of an Other.

Limitations in communication began to appear. It was 1997. Fr. Giussani had always preached the Fraternity’s Spiritual Exercises live, but he began having difficulty with diction and decided to videotape them. We were there in front of him, a small group of people, because he did not like speaking alone in front of a camera; he wanted to see our faces to know whether his words reached us. At the end of his lesson he asked, “How did it go?” We answered enthusiastically, “Fantastic,” but before we could continue, he said, “You don’t understand. You can’t understand.” What could we not understand? “God is giving me so much during this time, but he is taking away my ability to express it. And He’s right to do it, because otherwise I would fall into pride.” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 976).

**His journey through pain.** The illness continued its course, and the most feared symptom began to appear: pain. At this time, he commented that “God allows suffering in order for life to be more itself. Life without suffering shrivels and closes itself off” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 1074). But at times the pain was strong and lasted a long time. I was sad because I did not know

*“I said to him, ‘When you are this way, you must feel very alone.’ He answered, ‘I’m never alone, because Christ is the indivisible companion of my ‘I.’”*

how to help him, but he told me, “Don’t be sad. Even this is positive. I think this is the way to participate in Christ’s Passion, because He, too, was a man like me” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 1057).

**Life became harder** and harder. He lost his mobility and speech, and had many painful moments, but his human stature was never diminished. The needs of his heart continued to remain alive. He wanted to live circumstances intensely, saying yes to the mystery. He knew that Christ had endured and overcome the circumstances, and so he said, “God does not show His love only when He gives us good things, but also when He permits things we don’t like.” The certainty that God’s love gave him was perceptible in his state of mind. One day when he felt better he said, “It’s like the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Saint Riccardo Pampuri were telling me, ‘We care about you, go ahead, we are

doing our best!’” But one day he discovered he was feeling another type of pain. He was very sad and I asked him, “Is something wrong? Are you in pain?” He answered, “I don’t have anything physical, but I can’t stand the thought that so many people do not know Christ.”

I saw how he lived for Christ and in Christ on the feast day of his namesake saint, Saint Aloysius (Luigi) Gonzaga. By then he was very ill, and he told me, “I have very little life left, but until my last breath my first feeling is gratitude, because it comes from Him” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 1127). This left me thoughtful, because the usual thing you hear in these situations is, “This life is no life. Better to die than live this way.” Instead, his first sentiment was gratitude, an acknowledgment of God as the source who communicated life to his being. Another key moment for understanding who Christ was for him was when he went through a period of inactivity, something fairly

common in Parkinson’s patients. It happens suddenly, without any warning and it is as if the patient’s battery has run down and is completely empty. When he came out of that trance, I said to him, “When you are this way, you must feel very alone.” He answered, “I’m never alone, because Christ is the indivisible companion of my ‘I.’” I have desired to cherish these words in my heart for all the days of my life.

**A crucial day arrived**, which really affected me. In October 2004 he had a very hard day and that evening, when everything was over, he said, “What a horrible day!” That is how he was, a realistic man, but right away he added, “But if I live this day with a yearning to go through and experience these circumstances, living the occasions that the Mystery allows, I am certain I will walk better and more quickly towards the Destiny I will one day see, much better than I would walk according to all my own plans for living this day. For this reason this day is beautiful because it is true” (cf. *ibid.*, p. 1127).

As you can imagine, hearing this after such a terrible day—and it was not the only one—I understood that he was living life as an offering, with unlimited trust in the Father’s plan. He sensed that the definitive encounter was close and accepted His will, knowing that everything was for his good, and desiring ardently to collaborate in the redeeming work of Christ. ■



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# To Give One's Life for the Work of Another

LUIGI GIUSSANI

*Edited by Julián Carrón*

Some of Father Luigi Giussani's most poignant teachings, available in print for the first time.

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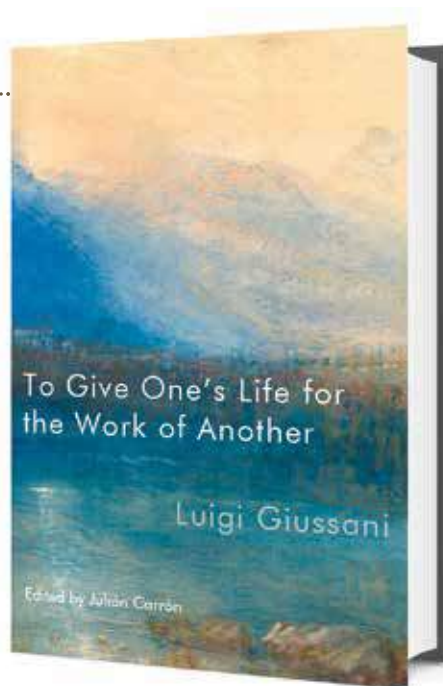
Father Luigi Giussani engaged tirelessly in educational initiatives throughout the course of his life. Much of his thought was communicated through the richness and rhythm of oral discourse, preserved as audio and video recordings in the archive of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in Milan.

This volume presents the last three spiritual exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, drawing from the transcripts of these recordings. In these exercises Giussani investigates the rise of ethics and the decline of ontology that have accompanied modernity and the spread of rationalism. Bearing up against old age and illness, he resisted the urge to withdraw, instead finding new avenues of communication and the technological means to reach all corners of the movement. *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another* explores the nature of God, the powerful human experience of self-awareness, and the fundamental components of Christianity, in the unmistakable voice of a consummate teacher.

At a time when young people are abandoning the church and questioning the value of faith, Father Giussani's method of judging and verifying Christianity as an experience is a timeless intervention.

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Monsignor **Luigi Giussani** (1922–2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy. His works are available in over twenty languages and include the trilogy *The Religious Sense*, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, and *Why the Church?*, as well as the three volumes of *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*



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## SPECIFICATIONS

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