



WORKS OF MERCY – Guidelines for Group Leaders

TVB WITHOUT INTERRUPTION! "BURY THE DEAD"

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Death: a difficult issue to address

- **The tendency in our culture is to dismiss the topic of death.** People don't want to face it and especially avoid talking about it with teens and children. The result is that young people don't know how to mourn a loved one, a friend or an acquaintance in a way that helps them to grow.
- **Death is not unknown to young people.** Many of them have already experienced the loss of a family member or friend, who continue to live in their memories. They absorb **what the mass media conveys about death**, often without an opportunity to meet and talk about their feelings, questions and fears.
- Burying the dead is an expression of human compassion, but also **a witness to our faith in the full and eternal life in God**. For Christians, death is the encounter with Jesus, with God who is Love. The cult of the dead, also present in many societies and traditional religions, shows how human beings have within the hope of a life after death.

What attitudes should be encouraged in the youth?

- To address the issue of death and of sorrow for those who have passed on to the next life, you need to **create the right setting**. Prepare an atmosphere of openness and great trust, with plenty of time, peace and quiet, without interruptions, respecting the views and experiences, and also the silence, of each individual. **Bringing out the feelings, questions and convictions of the youth helps center on this important experience in life** which they often face unprepared.
- We can encourage **a relationship with those who are in the Heavenly Mariapolis**: either with visits to the cemetery, caring for the graves, etc., or by making known some moments of their lives and praying for them, with the intention of continuing the love relationship that binds us together even after death.
- In the **context of a community**, this aspect of life is an opportunity to give comfort and support to one another, or staying close to families who have recently lost a loved one, or to remember together our deceased.

Some useful texts to explore the topic

CHIARA LUBICH, *Like a rainbow, nature and physical life*, Rome 2000, pp. 74 – 77 (page 3 **Chiara Lubich**)

BEFORE THE MEETING

Who in the community can we involve? How?



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STEPS TO TAKE TOGETHER (SPECIFIC GOALS)

- Encourage the sharing of feelings and experiences related to the loss of a loved one, etc.
- Promote actions that show respect and care for the holiness of burial places and the dead.
- Strengthen belief in the resurrection of the body and in the certainty that the love relationship with those who are now in the Heavenly Mariapolis continues.

MATERIALS SUITABLE FOR YOUTH

CHIARA LUBICH, *Response to Super Congress of Youth for Unity, Arrivederci*, Rome, May 26, 2002 – (page 4 Chiara Lubich)

PPT of gen 3 of the Heavenly Mariapolis – (Attachment PPT *The life of Paulina*, pages 5-6 *Bury the Dead – Life of Paulina*) and (Attachment PPT *Heavenly Mariapolis Gen 3*)

Proposals for activities to help develop the meeting:

- "Dia de los Muertos": an animated cartoon without words that presents the Mexican tradition of honoring the deceased and our relationship with them
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v4-1wFEzM0>
- Gospel passage: "The Resurrection of Lazarus" with questions and directions for an easier internalization of the text (Pages 7 – 9) and game (Pages 10 - 11)
- For a film forum with dialogue and reflection: "**Letters to God**" (original: *Letters to God*), USA 2010. The film (translated into several languages) gives an explanation of the supernatural significance of suffering and death and the value of prayer. Trailer in English
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBDK2LGn4p0>

EVALUATION

- In this meeting have we strengthened our team spirit and sharing among all? Has this increased the climate of trust and mutual love? Have we experienced the presence of Jesus among us?
- Does it seem that hope in the resurrection and our relationship with the deceased has been strengthened?
- Have we put these words into practice in daily life, possibly with some concrete action?
- Have we involved the community?



CHIARA LUBICH

Marino (Ice Palace), May 25, 2002, Gen 3 Supercongress

Death frightens me terribly! To know that I won't wake up anymore, that I won't be able to grow anymore, that I won't be able to know anymore makes me even more fearful. I'd like to know how I can deal with this fear that I have?

You're afraid of death. This is understandable! No one is happy to see a dead person, no one! We are all frightened, saddened. However, we must be careful here to consider things in the right way.

We say that death exists and it doesn't exist. There is death for those who see you from the outside, for those who close your eyes, who see that you are not breathing anymore; but inside, you see, you see Jesus – this is in accordance with our Christian creed – Jesus appears to you as a judge to judge you... the life that you lived, but it's always him and he is love.

If you tried to love in your life, you'll be able to repeat what that man who died a few days ago said: "I'm not afraid because my judge is my friend." He had been his friend all his life through, and so he wasn't afraid of the judge. So we must be careful and consider death in the right way, because we continue to live, we continue to live.

Then you say: "I'm afraid of not waking up anymore!" But you do wake up! Another truth of our faith is the resurrection of the body. We will rise up more beautiful than we are now. In fact, we feel this so strongly, first of all, because Jesus rose, and 500 people saw him. He remained on earth for another 40 days to stay with his disciples and to lay the foundations of the Church. So if he rose and if he tells us: look, you will rise, we will rise. We feel this so strongly that when someone leaves.... The Movement is very vast and so people leave almost every day. When I hear: "He left...!" I don't say: "What a pity!" Certainly, I pray that he goes to heaven, as high in heaven as possible. But then I say: "Until we meet again, until we meet again!" Because we will see one another again, we will see one another again.

Many others are afraid too, like boys and girls who might say: "Oh, when my Mom dies, how...? And when my Dad dies...?" If this happens, you must not only cry, certainly, it's logical, it's human to cry, but say: "Until we meet again, until we meet again!" because this is the way it is.

Then you say that you're afraid that you won't be able to know anymore. We do know, we do know.... We have the other life! This proves that there is another life, and it's eternal. We will know more and more, more and more. Oh, what a heaven it will be!

Gen 3 Congress, Castelgandolfo, January 6, 1999

Why does God, who can do all things, allow illness to take away from us the people we love so much?

Because God knows things better than we do. He knows the value of suffering, suffering usually comes before death, and he knows the reason for death. He knows people better than we do and he knows that people are not only made to stay here on this earth for a few years, but that then there is eternity, there's heaven, or also hell, if we don't correspond to the grace of God.

So we don't understand the reason for suffering, for that headache, for that illness. He knows the reason for suffering. If he wanted to, he could have found another way to save us all. For example, he could have said: "I am coming like a great glorious king and I call everyone to the kingdom of God, saying 'Come, I'll bring you to heaven.'" Or else he could have said: "I'll transform myself into music and I'll sing all over the earth and draw all people into heaven." Or who knows what else he could have said. Instead, he said: "I will go up on the cross and die," because he knew that suffering is the most precious thing. "You, Lord, are my only good." Why? Because it's the most precious thing, the most precious thing! He chose suffering.

And so we naturally ask: "Among all the possibilities that you had, why did you, Jesus, choose suffering?" I understood that He chose suffering, and he wants us to love suffering, too, because then for all eternity, we won't have to say: "You saved me, you really had to come, you did everything, I'm nothing." No, he wanted us to go to heaven holding our heads up high, saying: "With your grace, Jesus, I did my part, too. I embraced suffering, too." Because he wants us to be sons and daughters with dignity, who know how things are. So suffering is the most precious thing there is.

And what about death? Death is the door that leads us to the next Life, which is the one that goes on and on. Virgo¹ has already passed through that door. She knows what it means. She went through this experience. If she could return, she would tell us about it, and say, "In that moment I met Jesus and he said to me: 'Come with me, because you founded the Gen 3!'" That is what he would say to her.

¹ Virgo Folonari (1934 - 1998). She worked with great passion for thirty years from 1966, together with Chiara Lubich, in laying the foundation of the new generations and in particular of the Gen 3 Movement entrusted to her.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE WHO HAVE REACHED THE HEAVENLY MARIAPOLIS

“What should our relationship be with our brothers and sisters who have already reached the Heavenly Mariapolis? It’s a two-fold relationship: one with their body and one with their soul.

Regarding their bodies we have a great desire: that they should be transferred, if possible, and buried near the places where we live, in the permanent Mariapolises that are being built.

We feel for them a similar love to that of the first Christians for their martyrs. We want them to be surrounded by an atmosphere not of death but of life. We would like them to be laid to rest in marvelous gardens, where we can go and pray for them and remember their life and their example.

As far as their soul is concerned, we can have a relationship with them that is essentially the one which we already had with them when they were on earth. And this relationship can be even greater. In fact, if something has remained in them, it is charity, the charity they had towards us in life and which has now been made perfect. For our part, we must have charity towards them.

We can only love them through that work of mercy that tells us to pray for the living and the dead. If we pray for them, with the intention of giving them our tribute of love, they will certainly not fail to do their part, as we are already experiencing. These brothers and sisters of ours remind us that our movement is a mystery of suffering. Yet, just as we see the life of God in the sick which does not decrease with suffering but which increases, so too if we accept with joy this separation from them, which God has ordained, they will remain united with us, not only in the city or nation they worked in here on earth, but all over the world. We will be able to ask their intercession no matter where we are and receive their help.”¹

OUR CEMETERIES

“Recalling the first Christians, I would like our Heavenly Mariapolis (i.e. our cemeteries where we bury our dead) while conforming to all the health regulations, to be a beautiful, big, spacious park-like garden with benches scattered here and there among the tombs.... Then we can go there to have meditation and to talk in the midst of our dead, i.e. in the midst of our living. If the first Christians lived in the catacombs, in the midst of their dead without fear of being contaminated, so much more can we do it out in the open. This is the veneration for the dead that the Church wants because our bodies have been temples of the Holy Spirit and will rise again.

We will place the Word of Life of each one on their tombs and we will conserve their writings and the books written about them.”²

“And today, All Saints Day, we went to visit our dead at the cemetery at Rocca di Papa. The tombs had been decorated for the feast. (...) Now these tombs begin to speak. I heard of someone who was deeply moved, just passing from one to the other, reading the Words of Life and seeing the love that continues.

Therefore, our cemeteries, too, even though not limited to just ‘our people,’ begin to speak. And this is what we have always wanted. Our dead are alive. Love in them is always alight and it speaks and touches hearts. When we go to see them there is an atmosphere of celebration. And the feast days of the saints and the anniversary of the dead are for us like one and the same day.”³

¹C. Lubich, *Talk for the Mariapolis*, 1964.

²C. Lubich, *To the zone directors*, Zurich, 11 August 1962.

³C. Lubich, *Diary*, 1 November 1968.

PAULINA: I WANT TO LIVE!

On July 23, 2008, Paula, better known as Paulinha, a 16-year-old gen 3 from a town near Sao Paulo, Brazil, completed her “Holy Journey.” Her life was a real masterpiece!

From the time she was a small child, Paulinha had suffered from a very serious lung disease and had to go constantly back and forth to the hospital for treatments. For a long time she got nourishment through a feeding tube and so she couldn’t really live a “normal” life. On May 4, 2008, she wrote: “With every passing day there are more and more things I can no longer do. I can’t climb the stairs anymore, I can’t walk very far, I can’t carry a backpack....” And yet everyone who knew her said she always had a smile on her face and a contagious love for life. Her secret? She revealed it in that same letter: “I try to see Jesus Forsaken in all the little things, Jesus who comes and asks me to love him more and more.” She had learned to recognize Jesus Forsaken in her illness ever since she was gen 4. For her he was not someone who would resolve her situation, but her Bridegroom to love with joy.

Once Paulinha went through a very dark and difficult period. It was when she suffered a lot because she could no longer feel the presence of God. She even doubted his existence and wondered if there really was a heaven, and, above all, she was very afraid to die. She often said: “I don’t want to die. I want to live!”

Then, right at that time, during the Gen 3 National Congress, she heard about the path that Mary had traveled when she followed Jesus. She immediately tried to find out which steps she had already taken, and which ones she still had to face. Knowing she was on the Mary’s road was a great help to her.

Furthermore, Paula had a wonderful relationship of unity with Chiara Lubich and shared with her everything she was going through. Chiara explained to her in a letter that this difficult moment was part of God’s loving plan for her, since he wanted to unite her more and more to himself. Chiara also gave her a new name, “Paula Miriam,” that is, “Little Mary,” and the Word of Life, “The Lord is always at my side.”

Some time later, Paula shared this very special experience with the gen 3, thinking that it would help them. It was a very powerful moment, especially at the end when she strongly encouraged them all to focus more on Jesus in the midst with their gen leader and in the gen 3 unit, because - and it was her experience - “if you give everything to Jesus you can overcome any difficulty.” Two priests who were present that day said how deeply impressed they were by her maturity.

The Ideal was really everything for her. The doctors were convinced that what was keeping her alive was the great treasure she had in her heart. Her desire was to share this treasure with many other people so she was always the first to take invitations to the schools or distribute fliers on the streets for any project the gen were doing. She refused to give up the Focolare meetings for anything in the world! She begged the doctors insistently to let her go, promising them that she would take everything she needed. In fact, when she arrived at the Mariapolis with the IV tubes and needles, she joked: “I came with my little puppy dog.” Even when she phoned the Focolare from the hospital just a few weeks before she died, she told her gen assistant: “You can count on me being there for the congress in July! I’ll be there and help you present the theme on the Word.” And even when she found it very difficult to even breathe, as happened during her last Mariapolis, she still wanted to recite one of her poems as her contribution to the final celebration.

Many, many people testified to one or more of her qualities, including such varied people as

her hairdresser, the manager at her favorite pizzeria and the Municipal Minister for Public Health. They spoke at her funeral about her ability to build simple and deep relationships with everyone. At the Mass celebrated in her school, the students and teachers all had something to say about her. They said she had brought a real revolution into their school, even though she had only been there for a year and a half, since moving there to get treatments at a hospital in Sao Paulo. One of the teachers, who had been at that school for 15 years, said that she had created a “new culture,” completely changing the atmosphere from one in which the students didn’t care about one another at all to one of encounter and friendship among all. The chaplain said, “Our school should write a page in its golden book about the presence of Paula among us.”

Just recently, some of her friends in the Ideal went to that school and held a program for all the students. They reflected on the meaning of their lives and how much God had given them and they prayed all together for Paula.

She died while a group of gen 3 and gen 2 were saying the rosary in the corridor outside her room. She had a look of great peace on her face, precisely because she had accomplished what she had always desired - to be part of the generation of Chiara’s saints.

Taken from: *Gen 3*, Rome 2008, magazine for teens, ed. Città Nuova



THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS (Jn 11:1-45)

Readings for the youth:

Read the text describing the resurrection of Lazarus, individually or in small groups. While reading, try to follow the group of disciples who follow Jesus from Galilee to Bethany. Try to capture all events, from the Martha and Mary sending the news to Jesus, until the resurrection of Lazarus.

Dividing up the text to help with the reading:

Jn 11:1-16: Jesus hears the news and sets off for Bethany

Jn 11:17-31: The meeting of Jesus with the two sisters and Martha's profession of faith

Jn 11:32-45: The great sign of the resurrection of Lazarus

Gospel text

- 1- 1-16: A certain man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had poured the perfumed oil on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, behold, your friend is ill." On hearing this, Jesus said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two days in the place where he was. Then he told his disciples: "Let's go back to Judea." The disciples said: "Rabbi, the Jews just tried to stone you and you are going back there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world; but if one walks at night, he stumbles, because there is no light." He said this and then added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I will go and wake him." The disciples said to him: "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Jesus was speaking of his death, but they thought that he meant he was just asleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I'm glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let's go to him." So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples: "Let's go too and die with him."
- 2- 17-31: Jesus came and found Lazarus already in the tomb for four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died! But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said: "I know that he shall rise again in the last day." Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, shall still live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She answered, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world." When she had said that, she went and

called Mary her sister, and said: "The Teacher is here and is calling you." Hearing this, she got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house with her to console her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed "going to the tomb to weep there."

- 3- 32-45: Mary, therefore, when she reached where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, and said: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved. He was distressed and said, "Where have you laid him?" They told him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "This man who opened the eyes of the blind man could not even keep this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone was placed against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man said: "Lord, by now it will smell, for it is four days." Jesus said to her: "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?". So they took away the stone. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the people around me, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go." Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he did, believed in him.

Some questions to help in the reflection

- What most caught your attention in this episode related in such detail? Why?
- What is the central and most important point of all that the text tells us? Why?
- What are the attitudes of the disciples? What do they say and do?
- What are the attitudes of Martha and Mary? What they say and do?
- What are the attitudes of the Jews? What do they say, do and plan?
- With whom do you identify yourself more: with the disciples, with the sisters, with the Jews, or with any of them?
- Have you ever had moments of mingled despair and hope, death and life? What supported you in these difficult times?

Some keys to the reading

- Two ways of believing in the Resurrection: The central point is the comparison between the old way of believing in the resurrection that occurs only at the end of time, and the new way brought by Jesus, which already conquers death. Martha, the Pharisees and the majority of the people already believed in the resurrection (Acts 23:6-10; Mk 12:18). They believed, but did not reveal it, since it was faith in a resurrection that would take place only at the end of time and not in the resurrection of this story, here and now. That first one did not renew life. It failed to make the jump. The new life of the resurrection will appear with Jesus.

- The profession of faith in Jesus is a profession of faith in life: Jesus challenges Martha to make this jump. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection at the end of time; you must believe that the Resurrection is already present today in the person of Jesus and in those who believe in him. Death has no more power here, because Jesus is the "resurrection and the life." So Martha, even before seeing the concrete sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, confesses her faith: "Yes, Lord. I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is to come into the world."
- They are human, very human, just like all of us. After the profession of faith, Martha goes to call her sister Mary. Mary goes to meet Jesus who was in the same spot where Martha had met him. She repeats the same words as Martha: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 11:21). Mary cries, everybody cries. Jesus is moved. When the poor cry, Jesus gets emotional and cries. Seeing the tears of Jesus, the others conclude: "See how he loved him!" This is characteristic of the communities of the Beloved Disciple: the mutual love between Jesus and the members of the community. Some still do not believe; they doubt: "Couldn't this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, keep this man from dying?" For the third time Jesus is moved (Jn 11:33,35,38). Thus, John puts emphasis on the humanity of Jesus against those who, at the end of the first century, spiritualized faith and denied the humanity of Jesus.

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS (Jn 11,1-45)

PREPARATION:

This activity attempts to encourage a dialogue with the youth about our Christian belief in eternal life with God after death. It is advisable to involve a priest or religion teacher to answer their questions. The activity is suitable for 12-14 year olds.

MATERIAL:

Some hoops about 20-30 inches in diameter (like those used for hula-hoops). You will need a large enough space for the group to move about.

TIME:

About an hour

STEP BY STEP:

This Gospel passage can lead to reflections and questions about uncertainties or recall life events that have been important for the youngsters.

Individually or in small groups, read the text describing the resurrection of Lazarus.

We recommend dividing the text for easier reading:

- Jesus learns that Lazarus is sick and returns to Bethany to raise him (Jn 11:1-16).
- Jesus meets his two sisters and receives Martha's profession of faith (Jn 11:17-31).
- The resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:32-45).

Then the students are asked to move freely around the room. On the floor are circles with the names of some characters from the story. Some possible suggestions:

- ☐ The disciples of Jesus
- ☐ Jesus
- ☐ Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus

In another part of the room is an empty chair. Anyone who sits on the chair has the right to speak and ask a question to one of the three characters, "I ask so and so..." Or they can express their thoughts by turning to one of them and saying, "I'd like to ask you...".

Anyone can go into the circle with the name of the character and give an answer, offer further reflections, etc. After all the youth who want to enter the circle have done so, the facilitator (or priest or other invited person) may also go into the circle and present further information and clarify uncertainties or questions. Between questions, the group resumes circling around the room, until there is no longer anyone in the chair with the right to speak.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY

A prayer service or a Mass could be prepared to remember the deceased grandparents, relatives or acquaintances of the youth and of the community.