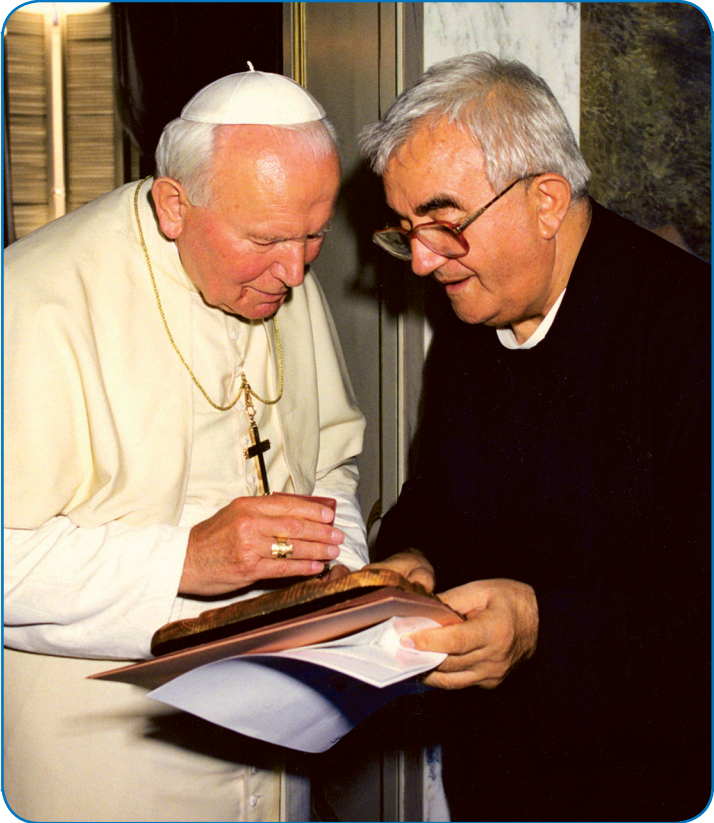




ASSOCIAZIONE **COMUNITÀ**
PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII
FOUNDED IN 1968 BY FATHER ORESTE BENZI



Foundation Charter, Statutes and Directory

Association
“Community of Pope John XXIII”

DIRECTORY

Directory for the implementation of the norms contained in the Statutes and the application of the guidelines of spiritual life contained in the Foundation Charter.

*Text approved by the Leadership Council
on 25 March 2011*

PREFACE (i)	53
CHAPTER I - OUR IDENTITY AND CHARISM (2-6)	55
CHAPTER II - LIVING OUT THE VOCATION IN DIFFERENT STATES OF LIFE (7 - 13)	61
7. Marriage	61
8. Priesthood	62
9. Permanent diaconate	63
10. Virginity and celibacy	64
11. Single people	66
12. Widows and widowers	66
13. Separated and divorced people	68
CHAPTER III - OUR SPIRITUALITY (14 - 30)	69
20. Sharing the life of the least of those in society	72
21. Living life as the poor	72
22. Creating space for prayer and contemplation	78
23. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience	80
24. Living a life of fraternity	82
25. Removal of the causes of injustice and marginalisation	84
26. Missionary activity: making Christ the heart of the world	86
27. Consciousness of being one people	87
28. Formation during the Period of Vocational Verification (PVV)	89
29. Ongoing formation	90
30. Main opportunities for formation	91

CHAPTER IV - LIVING OUT THE VOCATION	
IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS IN LIFE (32 - 36)	95
32. The family	95
33. Family homes	96
34. Prayer homes	100
35. Fraternity homes	102
36. Other welcoming centres	104
CHAPTER V - SHARING AMONG THE	
PEOPLES OF THE WORLD (37)	107
37. Mission ad gentes	107
CHAPTER VI - THE COMMUNITY	
AND THE WORLD (38-40)	111
38. Social and political commitment	111
39. The Society of Gratuitousness	113
40. Peace and nonviolence	116
CHAPTER VII - THE STRUCTURE OF	
THE COMMUNITY (41 - 82)	119
41. Official language of the Community	119
42. Voting and election procedures	119
43. Definition of a Community Area	120
44. Community Area Leaders	121
45. Cell groups	121
46. Community Days	123
47. Other Community meetings and events	125
48. Community Services in each Area	125
49. Twinning between Community Areas	126
50. Definition of a Community Service	127
51. The 'Guardian Angel' of a Community Service	129

52. Service for the Welcoming of Adults	130
53. Service for Missionary Animation	131
54. Anti-Occult and Sects Service	132
55. Anti-Human Trafficking Service	132
56. Service for Children	134
57. Service for Prisoners	135
58. Service for Elderly People	135
59. Street Outreach Service	136
60. Service for Young People	137
61. Service for the Coordination of the Arts	138
62. Justice Service	140
63. Juvenile Justice Service	141
64. Service for People with Disabilities	142
65. Service for Immigrants	143
66. Service for Legal Issues	144
67. Service for Liturgical Animation	144
68. Pro-Life Service	145
69. Service for Minors and Fostering	146
70. Service for Conscientious Objection and Peace	147
71. Operation Dove	148
72. Service for the Pastoral Care of Deaf People and their Families	149
73. Service for Political Intervention	150
74. Service for Roma and Sinti	151
75. Service for Schools	152
76. Service for Substance Abusers and Addicts	153
77. Secretariat	154
78. Administrative Offices	155
79. Fundraising	156
80. Sempre Publications	157
81. APG23 Audiovisual Centre	158

82. Documentation Centre	159
CHAPTER VIII - ENTITIES PROMOTED BY THE COMMUNITY (83 - 84)	
83. The Condividere Papa Giovanni XXIII Consortium	161
84. The Condivisione fra i Popoli Association	162
CHAPTER IX - BODIES WHICH SUPPORT COMMUNITY LIFE (85 - 88)	
85. Assembly of the Association	165
86. President	166
87. Vice President	167
88. Leadership Council	167
CONCLUSION (89)	
89. Institution at the service of charism	169
THE MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II	
	171
CONTACT INFORMATION	
	177

PREFACE

I. The Leadership Council, in fulfilment of Article 21 of the Statutes, approves this Directory for the implementation of the norms contained in the Statutes and the application of the guidelines of spiritual life contained in the Foundation Charter in the context of the present day.²

The Leadership Council has chosen to maintain some of the insights and remarks which Father Oreste Benzi, the founder of the Community, included in previous drafts of the Directory. Further quotations, taken directly from his writings and speeches, have also been added. The sources of these are shown in the footnotes.

² See closing remarks of Father Oreste at the three-day Annual General Meeting on 'Living Life as the Poor', 27/05/2007.

The Leadership Council has also chosen not to make the text too heavy and not to add too many attachments, leaving any necessary explanation to other Community documents. Footnotes give precise indications of where to find these.

CHAPTER I

Our identity and charism

2. The ‘Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII’ Association³, founded by Father Oreste Benzi, is a Private⁴ International Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right with juridical personality, established in accordance with Canons 298-311 and 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law⁵. It was formally recognised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on 25 March 2004, following a five-year period *ad experimentum*, which officially began on 7 October 1998.

The members of the Community are called to live in accordance with its rule of life: “*Depending on their*

3 From now on ‘Community’. *Translator’s note.* The official name of the Association is ‘Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII’, which cannot be translated in legal documents. From herein after, in the present document, it has been translated as ‘Community of Pope John XXIII’ for comprehension purposes.

4 Canon Law recognises two types of association: private associations, which are established on initiative of the faithful (can. 299), and public associations, erected by the competent ecclesiastical authority (can. 301). This distinction is linked to the more general distinction made by the Code of Canon Law between private and public juridical persons (can. 116).

5 See Decree of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 25/03/2004.

life situation and respecting the duties of their state of life, the Associates pursue conformity to the image of Christ, poor, servant and suffering, directly sharing the life of the least of their brothers and sisters by living life as the poor, conscious of being administrators, not owners, of the goods of God; endeavouring to make union with God a dimension of life and creating space for prayer and contemplation; making use of the spiritual help of both an individual and communal nature offered by the Association, in particular the periodic spirituality and formation meetings and the service of confirmation and guidance exercised by the leaders of the Association in accordance with the Foundation Charter; living in the communion of fraternal life with the leaders and the other Associates.”⁶

3. The Community is a single spiritual family whose members are of different ages and who live in different states of life. They recognise the vocation of the Community within themselves⁷ and choose to follow it, accepting the authority of the Community as the guarantor of their vocational path. Obedience is the objective criterion of admission into the Community.⁸

⁶ See Statutes, art.7, Rule of Life of the Associates

⁷ See Foundation Charter (FC), chap. 1, The Charism of the Community, Following Jesus, poor and servant.

⁸ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 1. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience.

4. All those who wish to become members of the Community, in accordance with Article 6 of the Statutes, commit themselves to carrying out a Period of Vocational Verification (PVV), which lasts at least one year. During this period of time, they enter fully into the life of the Community and make use of the various means and opportunities made available to them to support their verification request.

The request to start a PVV must be addressed to the President, who formalises it through the drafting of a letter to be presented to the Leadership Council at their next meeting.

At the end of their PVV, individual candidates must present a written request for membership, stating that they recognise the vocation of the Community within themselves. The President, after asking the opinion of the Leadership Council, writes a letter confirming their membership of the Community. This letter also contains the date of the meeting and the new member's chosen way of managing money and goods.

Candidates must be at least eighteen years old, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Those with mental disorders and/or learning disabilities can become members of the Community, even if they are not of sound mind. Their natural,

foster or adoptive parents, who are members of the Community, represent them in the choices the Community makes.

- 5.** Members of the Community are people who:
- a) Live in the state of marriage based on the wedding sacrament;
 - b) Live as priests and permanent deacons;
 - c) Live in the state of consecrated virginity and celibacy;
 - d) Live as single people;
 - e) Live as widows and widowers;
 - f) Live as separated or divorced people in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

Within each of these different states of life, those called to consecration can take the relevant vows: vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; vows of marital poverty, marital chastity and marital obedience, and vows of poverty, chastity as widows and widowers and obedience.

Consecrated people who are called to live out the vocation with a particular emphasis on prayer and contemplation can also take the vow of stability. This makes their choice of a contemplative life definitive and consecrates them to the heart of our spirituality: Jesus, poor and servant, suffering and risen, who atones for the sin of the world.

6. The Community, as a result of its vocation, has a very special presence with the poor, and this presence leads to action. It places its own charism at the service of the parishes and dioceses in which it is located, collaborating in pastoral plans concerning the poor, promoting initiatives which favour them and, in accordance with its charism, supporting the choices which these parishes and dioceses make. In this way, it welcomes and values the guidelines and programmes put forward by the bishops and makes a specific contribution to them.⁹

⁹ Text already present in the *Base Normativa* [Rules and Regulations] approved by the Bishop of Rimini, Mgr Locatelli, with the decree of 25/05/1983.

CHAPTER II

Living out the vocation in different states of life

7. Marriage

Married couples in the Community live their lives in accordance with both the Sacrament of Marriage and the vocation of the Community. Through the bond of the Sacrament of Marriage, they represent the visible sign of the love of Christ for His people. They support one another and, within the Community, are the primary educators of engaged couples.

Their relationship is further defined by the vocation of the Community through their ministry to the poor. By looking at their individual situation with love and simplicity, each married couple seriously considers welcoming those sent by the Lord to live in their home and asks the Community and its authority to confirm any decisions they make in relation to this.

In response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, husbands and wives can choose to take vows of ma-

rital poverty, marital chastity and marital obedience. They do this in order to live out the vocation more fully, strengthen their union in marriage and be more firmly tied to the Community. They recognise their own frailty and, in this way, ask the Holy Spirit for extra grace.

If both husband and wife follow the path of sanctification of the Community, all their choices will be made in relation to this vocation. If only one spouse is a member of the Community, only his/her life will be defined in this way. Careful consideration will be shown to the other spouse, without reducing in any way the inner commitment of the spouse called to follow Jesus, poor and servant.

8. Priesthood

Priests who are called to follow Jesus, poor and servant, in the Community further define their priesthood through this vocation and live out its spirituality. They allow themselves to be led along an inner spiritual path by sharing life with the poor and the least of those in society, who become their teachers in faith. In this way, they realise that which the Church established in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 6: "*Priests have a special obligation to the poor and weak entrusted to them*".

They place their ministry as priests at the service of the Community, in accordance with Article 8 of the Statutes.

In the same way as other members, priests can be elected as President, Community Area Leaders and delegates for tasks connected to the running of the Community.

9. Permanent diaconate

The specific task of permanent deacons is the service of charity, in its deeper meaning of service of the Mystical Body of Christ. This service within the Church joins each part to the other; each part lives for the other, to the point of feeling joy at being part of the whole. The charism of the Community leads deacons to pay particular attention to honouring those members which seem to be weakest.¹⁰ “The source from which permanent deacons take their strength is the crucified love of Christ, the Eucharist. They bring to the altar the full force of their life commitment so that torment within the Body of Christ can end and its members can be of one heart and soul.”¹¹

¹⁰ “What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones” (1 Cor 12:22).

¹¹ From the talk given by Father Oreste Benzi to appointed ministers in the Rimini Area on 21/07/1992.

10. Virginity and celibacy

Members of the Community who are called to live in conformity to the image of Christ not only in His being poor, servant and suffering but also in his state of virginity are a gift for the whole Community and are as important as those called to marriage. They remind us not to see as absolute something which has a transient nature and their life foreshadows the future which is to come. In the same way, families remind the whole Community to make a real commitment in the present, following the Lord in the here and now.

Consecrated people, living fully immersed in the world, remind us of what is essential. Guardians of the eternal, pilgrims in time, they look heavenwards, in union with their brothers and sisters here on earth.

The vows they take imply the choice of managing their money and goods through the communal fund or extreme poverty.

Virgins and celibates are special gifts for those brothers and sisters unable to have their own families. Through them, it can be better understood that human beings have a value beyond that of their state of life.

Virgins and celibates and those who are married support one another. It is desirable that this support will extend to their living together in the same house.

After receiving the confirmation of the President, those called by the Lord to give themselves to Him and the poor through a consecrated life can take the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in the Community, which, pleased with this gift of the Lord, commits itself to supporting them.

With the agreement of the President, candidates for consecration live out a period of discernment and preparation, which includes meetings aimed at nourishing their vocation and offering formation and support.

Temporary vows can be renewed. The President makes the final decisions regarding the timescale involved and the methods used, respecting both one's spiritual path and the relevant guidance given in the Code of Canon Law. Vows are normally taken in the presence of the President during the Community celebration of the Mass.

The Community commits itself to helping its consecrated members become an answer to the cry of the poor to God.

Dispensation of vows, which must follow the canonical order established by the Church, has to be confirmed by the President.

11. Single people

“Single people reach the fullness of sanctity and participate fully in the saving mission of the Church through the vocation of the Community even if they never marry and are never consecrated. Their state as single people, in which the Lord lives in fullness, becomes their state of life.”¹²

“Even those who live in this state of life in a non-definitive way are called to be moved by the love of God inside them. They are called to dedicate their life to spreading the joy which comes from the love they experience in their situation and to showing love to all those who do not know what being loved means.”¹³

12. Widows and widowers

“The state of living as a widow or widower, accepted and given to the Lord, is a way of achieving sanctity, building the Kingdom of God and participating in the saving mission of the Church.”¹⁴

“Life does not end with death but is transformed

¹² See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* [Quarterly Letter] no. 37, 15/08/2004, p. 5.

¹³ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 23, 15/02/2001, p. 7.

¹⁴ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 37, 15/08/2004, p. 6.

and enters into its fullness. Natural love transformed by the sacrament remains transfigured by the sacrament forever. Love for one's husband or wife remains the principle which gives everything life and which penetrates all aspects of the widow's or widower's life. Love does not end with the death of one's partner but continues to grow."¹⁵

"Widows and widowers are rich sources of love due to their particular situation in life."¹⁶

"They can develop their paternal and maternal roles by offering love and giving new life to children who are not biologically theirs."¹⁷

Widows and widowers can consecrate themselves to the Lord through the taking of vows. "This is a wonderful gift because you are consecrated in the Community, for the Church."¹⁸

¹⁵ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 11, 15/02/1998, p. 21.

¹⁶ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 23, 15/02/2001, p. 8.

¹⁷ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 44, 15/05/2006, p. 16.

¹⁸ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 37, 15/08/2004, p. 6.

13. Separated and divorced people

Separated and divorced people, who live in accordance with the teaching of the Church, are a great witness to marital fidelity, which is expressed in the indissolubility of Marriage even when one is abandoned by one's spouse. Living in forgiveness and in total giving of oneself to Christ and the poor, they experience the condition of the poor person who trusts only in the Lord.

CHAPTER III

Our spirituality

14. Our spirituality is rooted in our life in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit develops our identity in Jesus, poor and servant, suffering and risen, who atones for the sin of the world and who shares in the life of the least of those in society.¹⁹ Our spirituality allows us to:

- make progress on our path towards holiness;
- continue to build the Church;
- participate in the saving mission of the Church.

“The same vocation is given to all members of the Community but full comprehension of it is not given to individual people: each person is only given comprehension of certain aspects. Full comprehension of the vocation depends on the extent to which we live our life together.”²⁰ “Through our individuality, in communion with one another, we are a people sharing in a celebration which has no end.”²¹

¹⁹ This expression will be abbreviated in the text of the Directory which follows as ‘Jesus, poor and servant’.

²⁰ From the editorial of Father Oreste Benzi in *Sempre* [Forever], no. 4, April–May 1982.

²¹ From the talk given by Father Oreste Benzi to consecrated

15. We love our spirituality; it is our life, and it is through our life that we are present in both history and the Church. Through this spirituality we are able to grow, in all our different states and situations in life.

Our spirituality cannot be replaced or confused with another. When our spirituality is put to one side, the fruitfulness of our vocation falls short and our path in both history and the Church becomes ineffective.

The spirituality of the Community is shown through our lives and is the root of a culture of sharing, which is carried out in different ways and with different peoples.

16. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the members of the Community promote different ways of sharing life. They pour forth initiatives of love. After receiving confirmation that their inspirations and ideas do indeed come from the Lord, they must be helped to move forward with them and bring these new ideas of the Holy Spirit to the whole Community. The members of the Community must always be encouraged, supported and loved, even in difficult and dangerous undertakings.

17. Knowing well that we cannot give as charity what is due as justice, and that direct sharing contains justice in itself, the members of the Community openly fight to free the truth which injustice holds back in chains.

The Community's level of commitment to evangelisation and the liberation of the least of those in society is an indication of its level of vitality.

18. The members of the Community aim to place Christ at the centre of their heart in order to make Christ the heart of the world. The Foundation Charter includes the five elements of the vocation in order to help the members of the Community see, determine and demonstrate that they are living out both its inner aspect and its external, visible one. These five guidelines allow them to constantly assess their progress on the joyful path of conformity to the image of Christ.²²

Following this vocation opens up three wonderful dimensions of life²³: removal of the causes of mar-

²² In this presentation of the five elements, phrases from the Foundation Charter which are not essential have been deleted. The Directory should be read together with the Foundation Charter and the Statutes.

²³ See Letter of Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 37, 15/08/2004, p. 35.

ginalisation; missionary activity as a way of being, in order to make Christ the heart of the world, and consciousness of being one people in God. Through these dimensions, the members of the Community are able to realise “the new heavens and new earth” (2 Pt 3:13), the new society that we call the ‘Society of Gratuitousness’.

19. Vivacity is one of the characteristics of missionary activity. Joy is the sign that life in the Lord is wonderful. Living in joy allows the members of the Community to attract people to Jesus.

A) THE FIVE ELEMENTS

20. Sharing the life of the least of those in society

The members of the Community joyfully pursue conformity to the image of Christ, poor and servant, by directly sharing the life of the least of their brothers and sisters.²⁴

They identify the way in which the Lord calls them to share their lives, allowing their brothers and sisters in

²⁴ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 1. Sharing the life of the least of those in society.

the Community to help them in this discernment and submitting themselves to the Community's authority.

“The Lord has helped us not to limit the direct sharing of life to one form alone. Direct sharing is a way of being, realised in thousands of different ways which are constantly brought forth by the Holy Spirit, allowing us to be relevant in the present day.”²⁵ These different forms of direct sharing do not exclude welcoming people to live in one's own home; this makes the gift fully visible.

Through direct sharing, we continually discover that what the least of our brothers and sisters ask of us is to share our lives with theirs, without reservation. We must allow ourselves to be transformed and changed in order to be able to love and welcome them, people who are often desperate and hurt. “Direct sharing marks the beginning of a new humanity in which the pace of history is set by the poor.”²⁶

²⁵ From the reflections of Father Oreste Benzi at the three-day biblical retreat in July 1990 on the theme of ‘The Apocalypse’ (text not yet published).

²⁶ Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 32, 15/05/2003, p. 16.

21. Living life as the poor

The members of the Community live their lives as the poor.²⁷

“They are administrators of the goods of God, not owners. This is one of the most revolutionary aspects of the Community.

All members of the Community are called to give account of the way in which they choose to manage the money and goods they come to possess. This choice is very important; it sets a person free and does not allow for any compromise or deceit.”²⁸

The relationship which the members of the Community have with the money and goods they come to possess can be managed in four different ways.

“Each way is a gift of the Lord given to help us realise our personal calling to live life as the poor.”²⁹

«Ogni modalità è un dono del Signore per realizzare la chiamata personale a vivere la vita da poveri.»³⁰

²⁷ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 2. Living life as the poor.

²⁸ See closing remarks of Father Oreste Benzi at the three-day Annual General Meeting on ‘Living Life as the Poor’ 27/05/2007.

²⁹ See Ibid.

³⁰ See Ibid.

1. Personal management of the money and goods that one comes to possess. “In addition to being asked to explain how one manages one’s money and goods, one is also asked to talk in advance during cell group meetings or in the Community about future expenses and financial choices he/she is planning to make.”²⁹ Those who manage their money and goods in this way “keep for themselves only what is strictly necessary to live in poverty and give back the rest to the least of those in society in different ways. These ways depend on their state and situation in life and are decided together with their cell group and with the confirmation of the President of the Community, who leads the Community in the Lord.”³¹

2. Communal management of the money and goods that the Community and individual members of the Community come to possess. The income of all those who choose to participate in this is placed under communal management and each person takes from it depending on his/her real need. Centres and individuals receive a monthly allowance, which is revised annually following the criteria and procedures established by the Leadership Council. Extra contri-

³¹ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 2. Living life as the poor.

butions may be asked for in order to face expenses which do not concern the ordinary management of day-to-day life, again following the criteria and procedures established by the Leadership Council. Money and property already owned before choosing communal management, and any inheritance received after, are considered separately; they do not have to be included. This way of managing money and goods is compulsory for those living in family homes. It is also compulsory for the running of the various welcoming homes, therapeutic communities and Community and Area Services. Those who choose to manage their money and goods in this way do not only ask for what they need but also commit themselves to making a financial contribution of their own.

3. Communal fund. Those who choose to live this way freely renounce all their money and property, in accordance with the relevant laws in force. They put everything into the communal fund, including money and property previously owned, and, through their established monthly allowance and any necessary extra contributions, take only what is needed to live in poverty. Their goods become the goods of the whole Community, given back to others, in particular to the poor.

4. Extreme poverty. “Live as the disinherited, without any certainties! Those who choose to live this way must give account of themselves to the Community in the same way as any other member. They empty themselves totally so that they may be filled with the love of Jesus, poor and servant.”³² Those who choose to live this way establish their monthly expenses and ask for these to be confirmed.

On becoming part of the Community, new members make clear to themselves, as well as to the Community, their chosen way of managing money and goods and ask for confirmation of their decision.

Through the development of one’s inner spiritual life, and in a constant attempt to fulfil the will of God and be truly and effectively poor, individual members of the Community may wish to change their chosen way of managing money and goods, and again ask for confirmation of this.³³

³² See closing remarks of Father Oreste Benzi at the three-day Annual General Meeting on ‘Living Life as the Poor’, 27/05/2007.

³³ For the text explaining these four different ways, see ‘Regulations for the better organisation of activities’, Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 29, 15/08/2002, pp. 62-68.

22. Creating space for prayer and contemplation

The members of the Community endeavour to make union with God a dimension of life and create space for prayer and contemplation in their lives.³⁴

Knowing that “we can’t stand tall if we don’t first kneel down”³⁵, every member of the Community makes use of the instruments indicated in the Foundation Charter (the Word of God, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Liturgy of the Hours, Adoration and spiritual accompaniment), in accordance with the level of maturity they have reached on their path of conformity to the image of Christ.

As part of the relationship of trust and love which they try to establish with Mary, the ‘short way to Jesus’, the members of the Community pray the Rosary “in order to ‘start afresh’ from Jesus at any moment of their lives.”³⁶ It is essential that they identify the forms of prayer they wish to use in order to make progress in their union with God and that

34 See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 3. Creating space for prayer and contemplation.

35 An often-repeated phrase of Father Oreste Benzi. For example, see DON ORESTE BENZI, *Con questa tonaca lisa* [With this threadbare cassock], Edizioni San Paolo, 2001, p. 17.

36 See DON ORESTE BENZI, *Il sì di Maria* [The ‘yes’ of Mary], Sempre Edizioni, 2005, pp. 22-23.

they give account of these to the members of their cell group.

Every member of the Community makes a commitment to take part in the times of prayer defined as compulsory, as far as it is possible for them. These comprise an annual desert retreat and the Community celebration of the Eucharist. Community Area Leaders should encourage members of the Community to take part in these.

Community celebrations of the Eucharist should take place in every Community Area on a weekly or at least monthly basis. All members of the Community Area are asked to take part. We value Community celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and give importance to the liturgical seasons.

Members of the Community are called to be contemplatives of God in the world, “in order to be relevant in the present day and to be able to read the signs of the times.”³⁷ Living in the grace of God spreads joy and allows the members of the Community to develop and grow.

³⁷ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 32, 15/05/2003, p. 18.

23. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience

The members of the Community regard obedience as a gift for themselves, the Church and the Community. It sets them free from loneliness and prevents them from withdrawing into themselves.³⁸

They choose to walk together (= obey) as a way of being. This choice is a consequence of recognising that they are living members of the Body of Christ and that they share in the close structural unity of the Church. They recognise the essential function of the authority of the Community, which has its origin in the authority of Christ. The Community is not an organisation: it is a communion in the Spirit.

With regard to choices concerning their own lives, the members of the Community must express their motivations, aspirations and desires, faithfully entrusting themselves to obedience. Obedience is the objective criterion of living out the vocation in the Community fully.

In this way, they experience creative, effective and responsible obedience and remain aware of the fact that they are called to represent themselves through constructive and sincere dialogue. Confirmation of their decisions is given by those in authority in the Community.

³⁸ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 4. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience.

The members of the Community willingly accept that those in authority may also take the initiative of making specific suggestions and/or requesting obedience.

Those in authority in the Community have the task of guaranteeing:

orthodoxy i.e. exact interpretation of the nature and content of the vocation of the Community;

orthopraxy i.e. its correct implementation as shown by the Lord in the here and now.

The President and the Community Area Leaders, in union with him/her, guarantee unity. “The President of the Community exercises the service of confirmation and guidance along the vocational path. Community Area Leaders exercise a service of participatory authority which derives from their being in communion with and in obedience to the President of the Community.”³⁹

It is vital that every member of the Community grows in his/her Community awareness, participating in the essential communal acts of both the Community and his/her Community Area.⁴⁰

³⁹ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 4. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience.

⁴⁰ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Vengo Signore, per fare la tua volontà* [Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will], School of Community Formation no. 6.

24. Living a life of fraternity

The members of the Community live a life of fraternity.⁴¹ They do not do this out of a sense of affinity or empathy but because they are called by the Lord to walk the same path of sanctification.

“Fraternity is the consequence of a mystical experience: discovering that we are children of God. It is not the result of an intention; it is the result of a conversion. If our relationship with God is weak, our relationship with our brothers and sisters will be weak too.”⁴²

Fraternity, the credible aspect of our spirituality, is the ‘training ground’ of our dialogue with others, which is carried out in any situation and which goes beyond any barrier or misunderstanding.

“Cell group meetings are a gift of the Lord, given in order to answer the need to live out as individuals that which the Community as a whole is called to live.”⁴³

41 See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 5. Living a life of fraternity.

42 From the School of Community Formation on ‘Fraternity and life’ held by Father Oreste Benzi in the Rome Area on 28/02/2002.

43 See ‘Letter on the Life of the Cell Group’, written by Father Oreste Benzi to the whole Community in approximately 1992 and included in preparatory document no. 2 for the three-day

They play an essential role in the life of the Community. Members of the Community can talk together, help one another, and reprehend and forgive one another through fraternal correction, a consequence of mutual love.

Fraternal correction represents the choice of forgiving one another and being reconciled. It is put into practice by telling our brothers and sisters the thoughts and feelings we may have as a result of their behaviour and it is carried out in order to make things clear. It is carried out in a charitable way, without judgement, and as a gift of love. Fraternal correction has its origin in the esteem in which we hold the person about whom we have doubts and/or a negative impression.

Fraternal correction must be preceded by praying together and invoking the Holy Spirit.

Members of the Community can choose to live together in order to make the gift of fraternity visible and to answer the cry of the poor.

Fraternity, lived out joyfully and in a free and creative way, is an important sign of the presence of the Kingdom. Together with direct sharing, it makes visible the welcoming face of God.

B) THE THREE DIMENSIONS

25. Removal of the causes of injustice and marginalisation

Direct sharing is our way of being present with the poor in any state and situation in life. It originates from the love of the poor and generates love for the poor. It is this sharing which urges us to remove the causes of need.

Direct sharing contains justice in itself. For this reason, the commitment to remove the causes of injustice and marginalisation is strictly connected to the sharing of life. It makes it full and credible.

“This is one of the most important aspects of our vocation. We cannot limit ourselves to rescuing the victims of this society. We must go beyond, to the point of preventing society from creating victims in the first place.”⁴⁴

“Placing one’s shoulder under the cross of one’s brother or sister is not enough; we need to stop these crosses being built. We cannot feed the starving and at the same time walk happily arm-in-arm with those who are starving them.

⁴⁴ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 2, 15/11/1995, p. 7.

A commitment to justice is therefore fundamental. We address those who have the power to oppress or set free so that the causes of injustice can be removed.”⁴⁵

This vision leads us to the heart of all events and urges us to seriously commit ourselves in the social field in order to be the voice of the voiceless and to fight in a nonviolent way.

There are many ways to remove the causes of marginalisation, such as removing the need for institutions through increased fostering, making old people’s homes unnecessary thanks to family villages and family homes, helping oppressed people and the least of those in society play an active role in society and the Church, liberating slaves and developing the Society of Gratuitousness and the principle of sharing life with others.

In order to realise this dimension, every member of the Community must:

- understand the different causes of the marginalisation of those with whom they are sharing their lives;
- know the solutions the Community offers to help remove these causes;

⁴⁵ DON ORESTE BENZI, *Con questa tonaca lisa*, Edizioni San Paolo, 2001, pp. 61-62.

– adopt the actions the Community carries out to help remove these causes;

– encourage people, particularly young people, to take part in these.

We cannot give as charity what is due as justice. We must openly fight to free the truth which injustice holds back in chains.

The Society of Gratuitousness is directly linked to justice and its realisation is of vital importance. The level of commitment of the Community to evangelisation and the liberation of the least of those in society is a measure of its vitality.

26. Missionary activity: making Christ the heart of the world

“Mission is an innate part of the nature of the vocation of the Community. Our identity is our communion with God and our brothers and sisters lived out in direct sharing. Such a communion naturally opens itself up to mission. The members of the Community follow Jesus, poor and servant, who came to proclaim the Good News to the poor. Direct sharing encourages us to proclaim this too. We tell the poor whom we meet that we have come to proclaim Jesus. We share our life with them and hold the weakest of those among us in the highest esteem.

Increased understanding of the image of the suffering Christ who atones for the sin of the world deepens the missionary aspect of our vocation.

The redemption of the world cannot happen if there is nobody to pay the price. Placing one's shoulder under the cross of those who suffer becomes a way of life; we receive a special sense of understanding of where the poor, the desperate and the least of our brothers and sisters are.

Living out the different dimensions of our charism makes the Community grow and its missionary drive increase."⁴⁶

The Community always considers requests to open up new centres and share our life in mission territories.

27. Consciousness of being one people

Recognising and living out our vocation creates a new relationship with our neighbours: "God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges

46 DON ORESTE BENZI, *Con questa tonaca lisa*, Edizioni San Paolo, 2001, pp. 64-67.

Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.”⁴⁷

“The Church is Christ, communicated and shared. It is the new humanity, the new people through which God realises his constant dream: the formation of a people where He can be the Father and human beings His children. Our consciousness of being the people of God is the linchpin of our Community. This consciousness fully satisfies each member’s need to belong.”⁴⁸

“Within the Community, each member is a point which supports the whole, in the same way as a sphere rests on one particular point which supports the whole. Our consciousness of being one people manifests itself in taking into account the effects of one’s actions on others. From this consciousness, the identity of each Community member comes forth.”⁴⁹ One of the most evident signs of this consciousness is participation in the Community’s essential acts.

⁴⁷ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

⁴⁸ Don Oreste Benzi, *Pasqua: Dio, in Gesù, crea un popolo nuovo* [Easter: God creates a new people in Jesus] in *La Resurrezione – Voce della Comunità Parrocchiale* [Resurrection – Voice of the Parish Community], Easter 2000, p. 1.

⁴⁹ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 22, 15/11/2000, p. 4.

Awareness of ‘we’ forms the basis of our children’s education, of relationships between members of the Community and of true participation in the life of the Church. We need to continue to make our awareness of ‘we’ even stronger by grounding it in humility and simplicity.

Among this one people, the weakest members are those most loved and cared for.

C) FORMATION

28. Formation during the Period of Vocational Verification (PVV)

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, who guides the Community and moves people to want to know and love Jesus, poor and servant, the President, Community Area Leaders and the person in charge of PVV formation work together to establish a formative path. This path clearly embodies the vocation of the Community in the light of the Gospel and is directly connected to the poor, in accordance with the vocation’s inner aspect.

During their PVV, candidates are accompanied in order to verify (= make true) that God’s calling is indeed for them to belong fully to the Community, a single spiritual family which, in its own unique way, ‘breathes’ together with the whole Church.

The President appoints the person in charge of PVV formation who, together with him/her, has the responsibility of organising both an annual programme and the two-day PVV meetings, which are held at least three times a year.

In each Community Area, the Community Area Leader can choose someone who, in communion with him/her, will organise other opportunities for formation and walk alongside each person carrying out a PVV.

Those carrying out their PVV are entrusted to their cell group and the Community Area to which they belong.

If the Community Area Leader thinks it appropriate, he/she can also recommend to the President that a candidate carries out a period of preparation before starting a PVV (pre-PVV). During this period of time, the candidate is helped to discover or rediscover the fundamentals of the Catholic faith through catechesis.

29. Ongoing formation

As with all vocational paths which follow Christ, the gift of our particular vocational path, given to us by the Lord, must be developed through choosing to carry out regular and relevant formation.

Our spirituality is nourished by prayer and the Word of God, by the Church's teachings, by the writings of the Fathers of the Church and the lives of the saints, and by the writings of our founder, Father Oreste Benzi, and the President of the Community.

It is also nourished by everything the Holy Spirit has led us to know and understand over the years. This is summarised in the writings of Father Oreste Benzi and in other Community documents.

Formation takes place during cell group meetings, Community Days, the three-day Annual General Meeting and at any other necessary and appropriate times.

In each Community Area, the Community Area Leader creates opportunities for formation, taking into account any specific guidance given by the President, particularly in his/her quarterly letters, as well as the needs of the Community Area itself.

30. Main opportunities for formation

Three-Day Annual General Meeting

Every year a meeting is held, which all members of the Community and people carrying out their PVV are called to attend. Children of members of the Community, the poor, the 'little ones', and all those

welcomed into the various homes and centres of the Community are also invited to be there.

Together, we celebrate the new life that the Lord has given us through our vocation. We give thanks, particularly during celebrations of the Eucharist, during which we introduce to the Community all those who, during the previous year, have become members of the Community or started a PVV.

Members of the Community can take their final vows of consecration to the Lord during these three days. Sacraments can also be administered if appropriate.

For members of the Community and those carrying out a PVV, this three-day meeting is a time to focus on and discuss topics which are relevant to the Community and our vocational path and have previously been considered in the different Community Areas during the year. After the three-day meeting, Community Areas can choose to organise a further two-day meeting in order to implement any decisions made.

For members of the Community and those carrying out a PVV, the three-day Annual General Meeting is a fundamental part of our formation.

It is currently held in Rimini, the town where the story of our Community began and where the body of our founder, Father Oreste Benzi, lies.

Desert retreats

Desert retreats are organised throughout the year, especially during important liturgical periods. In the summer we organise a biblical desert retreat week, which is led by the President. Desert retreats are important opportunities for prayer, meditation and silence in which members of the Community and those carrying out their PVV are expected to take part at least once a year. They give us the chance to conform ourselves more deeply to the image of Jesus, poor and servant.

Desert retreats are normally led by priests from the Community. The President also leads a moment of reflection.

Other opportunities for formation

In addition to the three-day Annual General Meeting and desert retreats, the Community organises other opportunities for formation:

- the 'School of Community Formation', which is held by the President at the start of Leadership Council meetings in the presence of the General Coordinators of the various Community Services, is open to all members of the Community and is reported on in the quarterly letters sent to them;

- meetings of the Leadership Council, a place of communion and formation for Community Area Leaders;

- general meetings for cell group coordinators, presided over by the President or Vice President and held at least every four months;

- meetings for the development of the specific gifts lived out in different states and situations in life, which are organised throughout the year and which include meetings for family homes, prayer homes and fraternity homes, as well as formation meetings for married couples, consecrated people and single people;

- courses, seminars and conferences organised by the various Community Services as part of their annual programme, which can be addressed to members of the Community only or opened to non-members and which include opportunities to develop one's understanding of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

CHAPTER IV

Living out the vocation in different situations in life

31. The vocation can be lived out in every situation in life.

32. The family

The family, as planned by God, is the natural place to welcome the poor, the marginalised and those who are alone.

The natural children of families who share their lives in this way are nourished by this direct sharing. They need it.

Natural families living out the vocation of the Community are characterised by prayer. They are enshrouded in prayer. Prayer ensures balance and the welcoming of the least of one's brothers and sisters. In the same way as any other centre of the Community, families can ask for the Eucharist to be made present in their home, if this is allowed by the

relevant Ecclesiastical Authority.

Families demonstrate the reality of life lived as the poor, of contemplation and fraternity, and of welcoming those in need.

Families in the Community accompany foster families and make themselves available, as far as possible, to help the various centres of the Community.

They work together with each other and increasingly aim to be God's answer to the cry of the poor, which constantly rises up to Him.

Natural families are supported by all members of the Community. Children of both natural families and family homes are thought of as children of the whole Community.

Families and family homes learn how to help one another, particularly when they are members of the same cell group. They belong to each other in a very special way.

33. Family homes

Members of the Community who are led by the Lord to give themselves to Him through sharing their lives with the poor in family homes become fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters to those in desperate situations, who have nobody to think of them, with whom nobody is 'in love' and who

carry the effects of a sin that belongs to the whole of humanity. People released from prisons, psychiatric hospitals and institutions; orphans who nobody wants to adopt; people who have been abandoned, exploited or enslaved; refugees, displaced people and immigrants, as well as many others, find people willing to share their lives with them.

Family homes are characterised by the continual direct sharing of life by parental figures with both their natural children and those who are given new life through love.

In family homes, there are brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, grandparents, young and old people, able-bodied and differently-abled people, and people with different problems and psychological backgrounds. Family homes welcome people of all ages and origin. The choice to welcome new people into a home is determined by the relationships which already exist within it and by the needs of those already living there.

Family homes in the Community of Pope John XXIII are thought of in the same way as natural families, offering real relationships with both parents and brothers and sisters.

The Community becomes the guarantor of the life path of each person welcomed, taking responsibility for his/her educational development and re-

lationship with the relevant public authorities, and choosing appropriate working strategies. It promotes the civic recognition of family homes, holding this in a dynamic balance between faithfulness to its identity and observance of the law.

Those in charge of family homes are members of the Community who have chosen this particular way of living out the vocation.

In addition to these reference figures, there may be other people present in family homes who help and collaborate in different ways, such as members of the Community, people carrying out their PVV, young people carrying out voluntary civilian service, volunteers, people on work experience, priests and consecrated people.

Members of the Community living in family homes are careful not to love those they welcome more than they love each other.

They love those they welcome, even if it is for only a very short time, as though they will be living there forever. We do not welcome our brothers and sisters simply to educate them, heal them or save them from neglect. We welcome them because the Lord loves them and sends them to us. Together with them, we belong to the Lord. We love them, and that is why we try to heal and educate them and why we remain with them, even when there seems

to be no hope.

Family homes go beyond the offering of assistance and service in order to become life shared.

As with the whole Community, family homes are not made up of those who save and those who are saved. We are saved together. Those who are welcomed have values which those who welcome do not have and vice versa.

Members of the Community living in family homes live life as the poor, completely emptying themselves (see Phil 2:5-11) in order for their lives to be determined by the situation of those who are welcomed. Family homes manage their money and goods through participating in communal management or the communal fund.

Each family home develops its life of prayer through the presence of a small chapel containing the physical presence of Jesus in order to “make the Eucharist the heart of family homes”⁵⁰. Family homes fit in with the local Church and the social situation of which they are part. They are willing to collaborate with both public and private organisations and do this without losing their vocational identity, which animates them and gives them direction.

⁵⁰ See speech of John Paul II during the special audience granted to the Community on 29/11/2004.

In the same way as natural families, family homes 'belong' to the whole Community; we support and sustain one another. Within the different Community Areas, opportunities for discussion and co-participation are set up. On a more general level, meetings are organised throughout the year which focus on formation, coordination and deepening understanding of the nature of family homes. The President nominates a coordinator for the preparation and management of these meetings.

The above formative path takes into account any requirements additional to those of the vocational choice which are made necessary by rules and regulations issued by relevant public bodies. The overall running of family homes is entrusted to Community Area Leaders.

34. Prayer homes

Prayer homes are places in the Community where prayer and contemplation are given a central role. They are essential to the life of the Community. Although they are located in specific Community Areas, their influence goes beyond these. They are places of prayer and contemplation for the whole Community.

Those who live in prayer homes must ensure they maintain a regular pattern of prayer, consistent with the choices they have made, and must take part in the relevant formation meetings organised for them. They must also make sure that organised moments of prayer are made available to guests. They should represent ‘hands raised up to God’.⁵¹ At the same time, prayer homes should also allow those wishing to spend a period of time on retreat to be free to organise their own life of prayer. Prayer homes, in the same way as all other homes and centres in the Community, respond to the cry of the poor through direct sharing, carried out by welcoming those in need.

This physical presence of the ‘little ones’ and the least of one’s brothers and sisters in prayer homes is both a characteristic and an expression of our relationship of love with God. This relationship is lived out through Christ, poor and servant, who shares in the lives of all people, beginning with that the least of those in society.

Knowing well that the Community can only be governed ‘on its knees’, prayer homes have the specific mandate of interceding on behalf of all our bro-

⁵¹ The expressions used are based on the talk given by G. Paolo Ramonda at the meeting for prayer homes held on 28/09/2008.

thers and sisters and requesting from the Lord the graces needed by the Community, the Church and the world.

Prayer homes are the primary testing ground of “the Community’s method and form of prayer, which springs forth from our charism.”⁵² They promote prayer initiatives for their Community Area and for the Community as a whole, including desert retreat hours, retreat days, ‘School of Prayer’ meetings and the Rosary.

Prayer homes are run under the direct guidance of the Community Area Leader.

35. Fraternity homes

Fraternity homes are places where fraternity, our love for God addressed to our brothers and sisters, is made visible and credible.

“They are a ‘training ground’, a place where one can practise emptying oneself in order to be filled with the love of God through the relationship with one’s brothers and sisters. They become centres which radiate fraternal life.”⁵³

⁵² See Father Oreste Benzi, *Alla tua luce vediamo la luce* [In your light we see the light], p. 30, School of Prayer, 06/05/1989.

⁵³ See talk given by Father Oreste Benzi at the two-day frater-

In the same way as all other homes and centres in the Community, fraternity homes are also open to welcoming the poor and the least of those in society: “those who set the tone of the fraternity lived out as part of our vocation are ‘our crucified angels’.”⁵⁴ Fraternity homes follow all relevant juridical and administrative laws in relation to this.

Every fraternity home has a designated person in charge, who is a member of the Community and whose role is confirmed by the Community Area Leader. He/She makes sure that the times of prayer and discussion decided upon are carried out, in particular regular house meetings, which are an important opportunity for the living out of fraternal life.

Individual fraternity homes establish their monthly expenses, which are covered by those living there. A contribution may be made by the Community for any welcoming activity carried out.

Fraternity homes are run under the direct guidance of the Community Area Leader.

nity home meeting held on 6-7 March 1999.

⁵⁴ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 30, 15/11/2002, p. 24.

36. Other welcoming centres

In order to better respond to the needs of the poor, the Community constantly looks for and promotes new forms of direct sharing, paying attention to the relevant laws in force. During the years, this has led to the development of many different types of welcoming and sharing centres and activities, including:

- therapeutic communities, run on both a daily and residential basis, for people suffering from pathological addictions to both psychoactive and non-psychoactive substances;
- Bethlehem Huts, emergency shelters for the homeless (the poor who do not come to look for us but for whom we must go and look), operational in the evening and at night;
- day centres for people with physical and/or learning disabilities, meeting centres, occupational therapy centres and sheltered workplaces, which are also run by educational social cooperatives promoted by the Community;
- farms, service companies and productive activities for disadvantaged people, which are also run by educational social cooperatives promoted by the Community;

- emergency shelters for minors, adolescents, adults and mothers with children;
- homes for the welcoming of enslaved people set free from the street;
- homes in which inmates can be welcomed as an alternative to being in prison;
- Villages of Joy, real villages where Community families and family homes live together in order to better respond to the cry of the poor.

CHAPTER V

Sharing among the peoples of the world

37. Mission *ad gentes*

The Pontifical Recognition of the Community authenticates its being part of the Church and recognises its particular vocation as a path of sanctification for all believers. Mission *ad gentes*, therefore, is not an ‘optional extra’ for the Community but is rather a joyful obligation which arises from the fact that the Community exists for all believers, regardless of race, language or culture.

In infinite love, the Holy Spirit foresaw the opportunity for people of every language and race to encounter the vocation of the Community. This vocation is a way of knowing Jesus, poor and servant, a

way of building the Church and a way of developing the Kingdom of God for the salvation of all people.

Therefore, the urgency of the mission *ad gentes* of the Church becomes the urgency to 'go on mission'.

The presence of members of the Community, including families, who answer this call to go and live out the vocation in mission territories is considered to be a gift of the Lord.

They are asked to go not only among peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, including areas where the Church has not yet put down roots and where the culture has not yet been affected by the Gospel, but also to those countries which, despite being traditionally Christian, are in need of a 'new evangelisation'.

The characteristic peculiar to the missionary activity carried out by members of the Community is the proclamation of Jesus, poor and servant, which is made through the direct sharing of life with the least of those in society and which reveals Trinitarian love to the world, as well as the reciprocal belonging of all humanity in God. This proclamation is essentially made through the 'vital transplant' of life, respecting ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and in accordance with the Teaching of the Church.

The Lord has greatly blessed this path and has called

many members of the Community to go to mission territories. The Holy Spirit has guided and enlightened us in this.

Missionary activity grows and lives in proportion to the level of our understanding that the Church as Communion is the universal sacrament of salvation.

Those who are called to go to mission territories must be adequately trained and prepared. It is especially important that they are able to love, without limits, each person the Lord allows them to meet, working in communion with the members of that particular Community Area and immersing themselves in the culture of the people.

It is essential to maintain and develop the bond between those who go on mission and their Community Area of origin.

Twinning between Community Areas is one of the best expressions of the Community's sense of mission.

CHAPTER VI

The Community and the world

38. Social and political commitment

Love for the poor, the life of whom we share, must extend to the point of removing the causes of need. For this reason, the Community undertakes a serious social commitment, through non-violent action, to building a fairer world and to being the voice of the voiceless.⁵⁵

The Community's working style is characterised by its direct bond with the least of those in society. The members of the Community never place their own good ahead of justice for the least of their brothers and sisters, with whom they stand side by side. They work in different ways to bring about justice, to free the oppressed and to proclaim the Good

⁵⁵ Text already present in the *Schema di vita* [Scheme of life], 6. The Community and the world, approved by the Bishop of Rimini, Mgr Locatelli, with the decree of 25/05/1983.

News to the poor.

Before choosing an area of study or a line of work, the members of the Community look at how this might be used to share more deeply in the situation of the least of those in society. They do this in consultation with the Community and the relevant person in authority, and in the simplicity and freedom which comes from their love of God and the poor.

They do not enter into the corporate nature of the line of work to which they belong. They do not fight for privileges for themselves but instead try to make work accessible to everyone, starting with the weakest. They promote every action which affirms the dignity of the human person and the principles of fairness and solidarity at international level, and support the right to safe working conditions and the guarantee of a dignified retired life.

They give back to the poor all the unnecessary money or goods they receive from their work, in ways which are considered appropriate and which are agreed upon in their cell group and in the Community. In this way, they aspire to realise the Society of Gratuitousness.

The members of the Community try to be present, as far as possible, in places where decisions are taken about everybody's lives, as citizens, and focus particularly on the needs of the least of their bro-

thers and sisters.

The Community does not bind itself to any particular party ideology or organisation but tries to see humanity through the eyes of the Gospel and to serve it fully, free of any social or political conditioning.⁵⁶ Members of the Community who make an active commitment in the political field do so in a private capacity and do not represent the Community in any way. They are asked to explain their commitment and actions in the light of the vocation, particularly in cell group meetings and in the Community Area to which they belong. They also maintain regular contact with the Community's Service for Political Intervention.

39. The Society of Gratuitousness

Acting within the current profit-based society is not enough to reduce the damage caused by the principles and laws which mould it. By reflecting on its experience and on the realisation of new life-giving worlds, such as family homes and other centres for the sharing of life which it has set up during the ye-

⁵⁶ Text already present in the *Schema di vita*, 6. The Community and the world, approved by the Bishop of Rimini, Mgr Locatelli, with the decree of 25/05/1983.

ars, the Community has outlined a model of an alternative society to that of the current profit-based one and has named it the 'Society of Gratuitousness'.

This has its origin in the nature of God, who is absolute selfless love, and in the Church, whose paradigm was the early Christian community in Jerusalem (see Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35).

"The essential characteristic of the Society of Gratuitousness is other-centrism. The impulse that pushes each member to act is the good of the other; in the good of all is also found the individual good.

In this type of society we invest ourselves and that which we have in order to take part and communicate. Individual abilities are not titles of merit but of service. The more one has, the more one gives. Of the goods produced, one keeps for oneself only that which is necessary in order to continue to work for the development and the good of all."⁵⁷

"In the Society of Gratuitousness, production is regulated by real and not fictitious need. As a re-

⁵⁷ See opening speech of Father Oreste Benzi at the international conference on 'The Society of Gratuitousness: uproot the system which creates poverty', held in Torre Pedrera, Rimini on 4/5 October 1996.

sult, luxury and the waste of energy and natural resources disappear. Whereas in the profit-based society, the weakest are always sacrificed for the good of the strong, in the Society of Gratuitousness those who are weakest are the indispensable ones. They are the humanising factors in all social rhythms and relationships. The Society of Gratuitousness is a communion of individuals who consider themselves to be administrators of goods, not owners, and who feel obliged to give account of this to all.”⁵⁸

The Society of Gratuitousness is not something which can be imposed: it is realised according to the extent to which it is adhered. In its own small way, and notwithstanding its limits, our Community presents a prophetic vision of gratuitousness. It is called to recognise, encourage and cultivate its seeds, seeds which already exist within the various situations, cultures, traditions and aspirations of the people and peoples the Lord allows us to meet.

⁵⁸ See opening speech of Father Oreste Benzi at the national conference on ‘The Society of Gratuitousness: Start again with the least of those in society, truly!’, held in Torre Pedrera, Rimini on 23-25 September 1994.

40. Peace and nonviolence

The relationship with conscientious objectors to military service who carry out civilian service in the Community has, since 1974, been particularly productive.

It has enriched the Community with a greater sensitivity towards nonviolence and peace.

Through the work of Operation Dove, the White Helmets and the Go'El project, the Community has been present in different situations of war and violence, where it has offered answers, beginning with direct sharing, to the problems it has seen. These answers have contributed in their own small way to the protection of minority groups, a reduction in the level of violence, the favouring of dialogue and the construction of pathways of justice, reconciliation and peace. This action has been carried out in war areas and in other places where the Community is present. This movement is a sign of the times, a fruit of the dynamism of the Spirit. It is the vision of a humanity without armies and wars which is described in the second chapter of Isaiah and which has started to take shape.⁵⁹

59 "Among the signs of hope we should also count the spread, at many levels of public opinion, of a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war as an instrument for the resolution of conflicts between peoples, and increasingly oriented to finding effective but 'non-violent' means to counter the armed aggressor."

We are currently living in the age of weapons of mass destruction and rampant globalisation, which allows 1% of the world's population to own 40% of its wealth.⁶⁰ It is an age in which the force of weapons and violence is an essential instrument at the service of strong and predatory powers. The cry of the victims of these tragic policies rises up from the ground. Alongside every violent action is the suffering of a supportive God, who is involved in the problems of humanity and who asks His children to act in order to set their brothers and sisters free⁶¹. The answer to the torture of the body of Christ is the living out of nonviolence.⁶²

(John Paul II, encyclical letter *Evangelium vitae*, 25/03/1995, no. 27)

60 See Report of the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU – WIDER), <http://www.wider.unu.edu>, quoted in *Le Scienze*, the Italian edition of *Scientific American*, 26/01/2007.

61 See Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-8

62 “It is necessary for Christians to help in the systematic development of the principles, practice and strategy of nonviolence, after these have been critically and carefully formed. In this way, Christians can and must show that nonviolence is a realistic way to eliminate injustice and violence and to introduce a just social and international order.” (Synod of Bishops, Second Extraordinary General Assembly, 24 November – 8 December 1985, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council).

As members of the Community of Pope John XXIII, we are asked to build peace, beginning in our own lives, and we are also asked to educate others in this. We are called to:

- personal conversion, which can change one's life and open it up to love without limits, and can make us prophets of reconciliation through forgiveness, justice and truth;

- be able to take evil upon ourselves and turn it to good, entering conflicts, living in the midst of them and trying to steer them towards a reconciled solution;

- think of the world in the same way we think of our own town and improve it, being open to working together with those of other faiths and cultures and following the words of the Holy Father John Paul II to religious leaders: "I renew my appeal to leaders of the major religions: let us join forces in preaching non-violence, forgiveness and reconciliation!" (Angelus, 30 November 2003)

CHAPTER VII

The structure of the Community

41. Official language of the Community

The official language of the Community is Italian. All members of the Community who are native speakers of different languages should commit themselves to learning this language. Official documents and writings of the Community will be drafted in Italian.

The Leadership Council will ensure that all official texts and others considered particularly important for the formation of members will be translated into the principal languages spoken in the different Community Areas around the world.

42. Voting and election procedures

In accordance with the tradition which has developed since the Community began, and to favour fraternal life, decisions are normally voted on openly (for example, decisions which are made during the three-day Annual General Meeting or during Community Days).

The President, Vice President, Legal Representative, Community Area Leaders, Delegates and Vice Delegates are elected following a secret vote, held in accordance with Canon 119 and Canons 164 – 179 of the Code of Canon Law.

Before voting takes place, a period of discussion and debate is held, during which anybody can express his/her opinion, make suggestions and declare how he/she intends to vote.

A) COMMUNITY AREAS

43. Definition of a Community Area

The Association is divided into territorial districts called Community Areas.⁶³ Community Areas are places where the vocation is embodied. They are places where members of the Community, following the path of direct sharing, take action to help the poor and the weak, serving those whom the Lord makes them meet and for whom they themselves are looking. They promote initiatives in their favour and collaborate with the pastoral plans of dioceses and parishes which concern the poor and which are compatible with both the needs of their vocation and the life of the Community.

⁶³ See Statutes, art. 18, Community Areas.

Community Areas are made up of cell groups and Area Services, which help with organisation and management.

44. Community Area Leaders

A Leader is elected in each Community Area, in accordance with Article 18 of the Statutes.

Community Area Leaders represent the President and exercise a service of shared authority, in obedience to and in full communion with him/her.⁶⁴

They have the task of ‘taking hold’ of life and helping it to grow (authority, from augere = to cause to grow). They carry the members of their Area in their heart and help each one play his/her part, valuing their uniqueness and confirming each member’s individual path. In this way, the Community Area can walk as one people.

45. Cell groups

Members of Community Areas meet together in small groups, called cell groups. In these, the members of the Community help each other along their path of

⁶⁴ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 4. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience.

sanctification and put into practice the choices made by the Community.

Cell groups help us live out the life of the Community and are places where close personal relationships can be formed.

They are ‘workshops’ of inner work, vocational life and joy. In them, we constantly look at our lives in the light of the Statutes, the Foundation Charter and the Directory.

“The cell group is the ‘factory’ of our Community awareness; it is a place of fraternity and a place where fraternity is nourished in a special way. The life of the cell group is not limited to meetings but expands into many other shared moments and activities in life, which allow members to fully experience this privileged path of sanctification.”⁶⁵

In addition to the members of the Community, those carrying out their period of PVV can also take part in cell groups meetings.

Different cell groups are directly established or agreed upon by the relevant Community Area Leader, taking into account the suggestions made by other Community members. As far as possible, cell groups are made up of people living in different states and situations in life.

65 See *Sempre* no. 10-11, November 1988.

Each cell group has a coordinator who is chosen from among the members of the Community and whose appointment is confirmed by the Community Area Leader. Members of the cell group can also choose a married couple to act as coordinator. The role of cell group coordinator lasts for three years unless otherwise stated by the Community Area Leader.

The cell group coordinator has the task of coordinating the lives of the members of the cell group in order to help them achieve sanctification through the vocation.

The cell group coordinators and the Community Area Leader are joined together in heart and soul. They meet together at least once a month and work for the Community Area's growth.

46. Community Days

Monthly Community Days⁶⁶, in which all members of a Community Area, including those carrying out their PVV, are required to take part, are an important moment of life which we share together.

They aim to help us grow in our awareness of

⁶⁶ In the Statutes these are called 'Assembly of Associates resident in each Community Area' (art. 18).

being one people which walks together, a 'we' which rejoices in the task entrusted to us by the Church. This task is to sanctify ourselves, to build the Kingdom of God and to carry forward the salvific mission of the Church which "encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ" (Lumen Gentium, 8).

The level of presence and participation in Community Days is a measure of our awareness of being a strong and humble 'we'.

Community Days are convened by the Community Area Leader. He/She also sets the agenda, which is sent to all members of the Community Area in whichever way is most convenient for them. It is sent sufficiently in advance to allow them time to prepare for discussion and debate on the different themes.

During Community Days, time is set aside for Eucharistic Adoration, celebration of the Eucharist and shared moments of fellowship, such as the meal eaten together.

47. Other Community meetings and events

In order to live out the vocation ever more fully as one people following Jesus, the members of each Community Area, with the confirmation of the Community Area Leader, decide what other Community meetings and events are necessary. They organise various meetings and initiatives, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

48. Community Services in each Area

In order to realise our faith and the path of justice that comes from sharing our lives directly with the least of our brothers and sisters, Community Services are set up in the different Community Areas in response to the needs most frequently expressed by the poor.

Members of a Community Area appoint one or more Area Coordinators for each Area Service. Their appointment must be confirmed by the Community Area Leader, who can also choose to make this appointment directly.

These coordinators have the task of encouraging members of the Community in a particular Community Area to be actively involved in its Services. They act in close relationship with the General Coordinator of each Service.

They stay in their role for three years unless the Community Area Leader decides otherwise. They give account of their work to the Community Area during Community Days.

49. Twinning between Community Areas

In order to grow as part of the Mystical Body of the Church, the Community establishes twinning between different Community Areas around the world, enriching both the life of its members and the life of the Community Areas which are twinned.

Twinning is confirmed by the Leadership Council, taking into consideration any suggestions made by members of the Community and the Community Area Leaders. They are periodically evaluated and, if necessary, changed by the Council, depending on the development of Community life in the different Community Areas concerned.

“Through these meetings between different Community Areas, the vocation is reawakened, fraternity grows and new levels of exchanging knowledge and experience are achieved. Twinning stimulates greater awareness and understanding of different standards and styles of life around the world. It is a means of material support, inner spiritual growth and celebration in our hearts, all of which is expres-

sed through the promotion of various initiatives and the taking of well-defined choices.

Twinning strengthens our sense of belonging to a single spiritual family. It increases the missionary spirit of each member of the Community and our understanding of its international nature.⁶⁷

B) COMMUNITY SERVICES

50. Definition of a Community Service

In order to pursue its objectives as effectively as possible, as they are stated in the Foundation Charter and the Statutes, the Community has established and continues to establish different Community Services.⁶⁸

These Services look closely at specific topics and areas of need and suggest solutions to the problems which are found. They raise awareness of these problems among members of the Community and encourage them to be involved in their work, so leading

⁶⁷ See Father Oreste Benzi, *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 6, 15/11/1996 and *Lettera Trimestrale* no. 7, 15/02/1997.

⁶⁸ In the following paragraphs (52–82), for the purpose of clarity, the Community Services which support the running of activities are listed before those which support the running of the Community.

them towards personal conversion. They also aim to lead society and ecclesiastical and public institutions towards structural change. The different Community Services are asked to promote their work in every Community Area. Therefore, they work at international level. Some Services have taken on important management tasks within the Community, supporting Community life and the various sharing activities which have developed over the years.

Community Services are established by the Leadership Council. The nomination of one or more General Coordinator for each Service is made by the Leadership Council upon the proposal of the President, who first considers the proposals put forward by the different Community Areas themselves.

The General Coordinator of each Service is normally in office for three years. At least once a year, he/she must show the Leadership Council the programme of activities which the Service intends to carry out, as well as the proposed budget. These must be approved by the Leadership Council.

The Community Services Coordination Team is instituted with the purpose of 'walking together as one people' and ensuring that every action taken as a Community is part of a unique plan aimed at building the Society of Gratuitousness. It normally meets at least once a month.

The coordinator of this team is nominated by the Leadership Council.

In keeping with the aim of acting as a single spiritual family, the different Community Services and their General Coordinators must continually work together and participate in the Community Services Coordination Team meetings.

51. The 'Guardian Angel' of a Community Service

The Leadership Council can nominate a Community Area Leader to be the 'guardian angel' of a Service, giving him/her the task of supporting its work and developing its relationship with both the Leadership Council and the Community as a whole.

CURRENT COMMUNITY SERVICES

A) SERVICES WHICH SUPPORT THE RUNNING OF ACTIVITIES

52. Service for the Welcoming of Adults

It is vital that people who are suffering and not able to manage on their own can turn to the Community and find someone who will listen to them with love. In doing so, they feel that they are no longer alone but have found a large family, within which they can share and, if possible, solve their problems.

Requests for help often coincide with the request for a place to stay or support of a financial, psychological, emotional or protective nature.

The role of this Service is to listen to people in need and to collect together the various requests for help which come from both public institutions and people themselves. The Service takes into account the presence of other Community Services which already meet specific needs.

Through its Area Coordinators and the Community's various welcoming centres, the Service tries to respond to requests in a timely and appropriate way, drawing up a personalised development plan for each individual.

It collaborates with public and other institutions at local, regional and national level.

53. Service for Missionary Animation

Mission originates in baptism, through which we are immersed in the life of God. The vocation of the Community is a way of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and is realised through sharing life directly with the poor.

This Service has the task of:

- encouraging members of the Community to consider whether or not the Lord is calling them to live out their vocation in mission territories, for a long or short period of time, regardless of the situation in life they have chosen;
- encouraging twinning links with mission territories where the Community is present;
- encouraging people to spend time in mission territories where the Community is present, with the confirmation of the President;
- organising training and formation;
- setting up meetings with missionaries in which they can speak about their experience, an important pathway to conversion;
- explaining how the Pontifical Recognition of our Community commits us to making its vocation

known throughout the world as a way of announcing the Kingdom.

54. Anti-Occult and Sects Service

This Service developed out of the need to be active in the fight against the growing phenomenon of sectarian groups which create victims and new forms of slavery in our society, especially among those who are vulnerable. Since it began, it has been consulted by numerous victims of the occult and has set up a National Freephone Number.

In order to fight against this phenomenon, the Service carries out continual training and awareness-raising work. It promotes initiatives aimed at preventing people from becoming victims and at removing the causes of the problem. It provides victims with help and support and, if necessary, welcomes them into the Community's centres and homes.

55. Anti-Human Trafficking Service

This Service has the clear intention of freeing those who are forced into prostitution and fighting against a phenomenon which is, in reality, a modern form of slavery. This is not a phenomenon which

needs to be regulated but an evil which must be wiped out.

The Community works by:

- meeting women who are forced to prostitute themselves on the streets and in clubs and offering them a way out through welcoming them in family homes and/or Community families and setting up social integration and protection plans which can offer them the chance of a new life;
- promoting awareness-raising activities aimed at both civil and ecclesial society in order to favour correct understanding and interpretation of this phenomenon;
- carrying out awareness-raising activities in order to influence public institutions, at both local and national level, so that laws and their implementation can be used to help free these women and not simply to contain this phenomenon, which is so contrary to human dignity;
- promoting activities to raise awareness of the methods and scale of human trafficking and possible ways of preventing it, particularly in the countries of origin of the women involved;
- helping and protecting victims through international cooperation programmes run in partnership with local organisations in Eastern European and African countries;

– helping to prevent human trafficking by collaborating with public bodies and institutions in the countries of origin of the women involved and collaborating with other foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which are active in the European countries where these women are brought and sexually exploited.

56. Service for Children

Childhood is an extremely important period of life in terms of personality development. It is therefore essential to take particular care during this period of time and to offer children positive and joyful experiences of life, the Community and fraternity, together with their contemporaries. It is also important to encourage their relationship with children with disabilities and their experience of being close to Jesus in their life.

This Service helps enable these things in various ways, including the running of an annual desert retreat for children and the provision of recreational activities for children during Community and Community Area meetings.

57. Service for Prisoners

In the synagogue in Nazareth, as a sign of recognition of His being the Messiah, Jesus says, “*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives*” (Lk 4:18).

The members of the Community recognise Jesus Christ in the prisoners they meet: “*I was in prison and you came to see me*” (Mt 25:43). We all bear responsibility for the crimes of others. Therefore, the redemption of prisoners must be the work of us all.

This Service leads the Community in this redemptive action. It is carried out through the provision of religious and moral support inside prisons and, in particular, through the direct sharing of life. Prisoners are welcomed and offered a way to restart their lives and be reintegrated into society. The vocation of the Community calls members who share their lives with prisoners to act in order to change the nature of the current prison system and develop alternative ways of implementing sentences which favour true rehabilitation.

58. Service for Elderly People

This Service developed out of the need to offer real answers and support to elderly people, who are further along the path of life than ourselves. The

principal aim of the Service is home care: enabling elderly people to live at home with their family. If this is not possible, we try to organise family ‘fostering’, placing elderly people in a family where they can take on the role of grandparents and have the opportunity to love and be loved. Elderly people are our roots, the guardians of history and memory. They represent a critical juncture in the circle of life.

The Service promotes activities, such as day centres and support groups, in order to help families which welcome elderly people and to favour the deinstitutionalisation process. Through organising awareness-raising events and producing informative material, it aims to promote a culture which recognises elderly people as integral and necessary members of families and of society as a whole.

59. Street Outreach Service

‘When the poor don’t come looking for us, we must go looking for them’: this sentence summarises the spirit of this Service perfectly.

The Community’s first experiences of helping people ‘of no fixed abode’ date back to the 1980s. We discovered an ‘invisible world’ made up of margina-

lised people whose most basic human rights were not being met and who were deprived of a social and personal identity.

Since then, the Community has been these people's neighbour. Every evening, in different Italian towns, street units go out to train stations, bridges, and any place where people might seek refuge, and spend time with them, offering them the chance to stay in one of the Community's centres.

Bethlehem Huts offer an immediate welcome, both in the evening and at night. They provide a bed and the warmth of a family, which many of these 'invisible' people have never experienced before. A chance to move on in life is also offered through the construction of personalised social reintegration plans.

60. Service for Young People

The Community began as a result of spending time with adolescents, recognising their need to be in close relationship with the Lord and aiming to answer this and other deep needs through encouraging a 'joyful meeting with Christ'. Today, we continue to understand that adolescents and young people are often lost and in need of direction. They are the field in which we must sow the Word of the

Lord through our vocation.

In addition to working with adolescents and young people who live in the Community, or with whom the Community is otherwise in touch, and always respecting the Teaching of the Church, we reach out to adolescents and young people everywhere, bringing them Jesus wherever they are. Key elements of this work are:

- you are a wonder;
- from oneself to others;
- the poor;
- building community;
- together towards Jesus.

We carry out this work through young people's groups, the 'Outside the Walls' project, artistic activities (dance, theatre, music), support in schools, sharing camps, opportunities for prayer (desert retreats), work camps and voluntary work in various centres of the Community.

61. Service for the Coordination of the Arts

This Service coordinates all forms of artistic expression in the Community. It aims to make the invisible visible, to 'be the voice of the voiceless' and to offer an alternative way of looking at reality.

Singing, theatre, music, painting and dance are

not only ways for us to grow but are also ways for us to speak about our life with the marginalised.

People with disabilities, former drug addicts, adolescents and minors who have been welcomed by the Community, as well as many others, take part in the Service's projects. This is not an anomaly but a deep form of truth: everyone is given the chance to express him/herself and realise his/her artistic dreams.

The Service supports arts projects which are already active in different Community Areas and helps them work together. It also develops new projects, provides training, plans arts events and, in general, uses the arts to demonstrate the beauty of the path the Community walks alongside the least of our brothers and sisters.

In this context, the arts are intended as a means, not an end. They offer an opportunity to meet and share time together. A workshop, concert or show becomes a moment of sharing and fellowship. There is space for everyone on the stage: the strong and the weak, those with disabilities and those without. Everyone shares in a joyful celebration, a celebration which also gives us chance to reflect.

62. Justice Service

At international level, this Service focuses on structural forms of economic and political violence. It analyses the mechanisms which create injustice, offers training and formation, supports the development of proposals for action, builds and maintains relationships with other national and international bodies (both governmental and non-governmental) and favours collaboration between the different Community Areas in its search for justice. Since 2006, the Community of Pope John XXIII has held special consultative status with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. This allows it to participate in various meetings, sessions and conferences promoted by the United Nations and to intervene in order to defend the poor and promote human rights.

At national level, the Service coordinates various activities in different Community Areas which are aimed at removing the causes of injustice and marginalisation. It does this in strict collaboration with other Community Services.

63. Juvenile Justice Service

‘Bad wolves don’t exist, only unhappy wolves’⁶⁹. This Service works with minors who have ended up in the criminal justice system and who have often been deprived of family, material goods, moral guidance and positive relationships with others.

Jesus is the one who leads and supports this work⁷⁰. He is the only one who can heal hearts through repentance, conversion and the gift of salvation.

In order to bring Jesus to these young people and remove the causes of injustice, the Service:

- works and carries out activities in young offenders’ institutions, aiming to spend time with young people and staff in order to favour the development of positive ideas and ways of thinking, including the development of personalised programmes and plans;
- organises the welcoming of young people into family homes or other centres of the Community;

⁶⁹ *Translator’s note.* This saying of a young girl was used by Father Oreste Benzi to express his firm belief that all people, even those who carry out the worst and most violent of acts, are sad at heart because they choose death when they really desire life. Nobody should be refused the chance to repent. Good must be victorious over bad.

⁷⁰ See Mt 25, Heb 13:3, Is 35, Is 42:6-7, Lk 5:31-32, Lk 23:39-43, Mt 7:1-5, Is 11:1-9.

- carries out activities in Community Areas where there is a high risk of criminal activity in order to intervene and try to prevent it;
- provides information and carries out awareness-raising activities on the juvenile justice system, aimed at the general public at both local and national level.

64. Service for People with Disabilities

‘Wherever we are, they will be too’. This initial understanding, which led the Community to share life with people with disabilities, has its origin in the words of St Paul: “It is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones” (1 Cor 12:22).

People with disabilities are not objects of assistance; they are a source of richness, a richness which creates life, and a central part of the Community. This can be clearly seen in our families, family homes, day centres and cooperatives.

This Service aims to:

- promote and safeguard civil, political, social and economic rights for people with disabilities at every stage of their life;
- look in depth at the spirituality, catechesis and mission of people with disabilities in both the

Church and the world and carry out training and awareness-raising activities aimed at public institutions at both local and national level;

- support the families of people with disabilities, helping to bring them out of isolation and enabling them to lead a more full and active life.

65. Service for Immigrants

This Service has its origin in the need to fight against injustice towards immigrants, injustice which can place their dignity and even their lives at risk.

People blame immigrants for everything, justifying this by expressing concerns over safety and legality. The equation 'immigrant = criminal' has attacked the human dignity of immigrants and violated their inalienable human rights.

For this reason, the Community believes it is essential to discuss and be involved in the issues of immigration, citizenship and integration at local, national and international level. It understands that immigration is linked to several factors, including the relationship between the south and north of the world, and it analyses the causes of this phenomenon.

The Service is active in safeguarding the inherent

human rights of immigrants, in accordance with the teaching and guidance of the Church, and also in safeguarding the rights of those immigrants sent back to their home country against European and/or international law.

66. Service for Legal Issues

This Service aims to ensure that the rights of the weak and the marginalised are guaranteed and respected. It works together with public entities and is active in all spheres of political and social activity.

It offers members of the Community opinions and advice and, in particular, helps other Services deal with issues in which it is competent (for example, the formulation of bills of law). It actively participates in the work of removing the causes of injustice and marginalisation carried out by the whole Community.

67. Service for Liturgical Animation

Our Community has always placed the celebration of the Eucharist at the heart of everything it does and joyfully received the invitation of John Paul II to make the Eucharist the heart of our family homes and of all our other social and educational activities.

The task of this Service is to encourage the involvement and participation of the whole Community in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the sacraments in general and in the Prayer of the Church, in accordance with the liturgical year.

It particularly focuses on preparing the liturgy for the three-day Annual General Meeting, desert retreats, the celebration of the Eucharist and other moments of prayer.

68. Pro-Life Service

This Service has the task of promoting and coordinating actions which help protect and defend human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. It helps mothers and fathers welcome children with dignity and love and favours the development of a more welcoming society.

The Community is active in:

- providing relationship education, education in natural methods of family planning and education aimed at increasing understanding of prenatal life;
- working with women/couples who are facing a difficult pregnancy and helping them prepare to welcome their child;
- praying for unborn children in cemeteries and at the front of hospitals where abortions are carried out;

- supporting couples with fertility problems and couples who have suffered as a result of natural or voluntary abortions;
- organising the burial of naturally or voluntarily aborted human foetuses and helping mothers/couples through the grieving process;
- respecting the life of human, test-tube embryos, favouring adoption for those who have been abandoned and/or are ill;
- working at local, national and international level for the recognition of the rights of the child before birth, for the development of a society which supports maternity and unborn life, and for the promotion of fair laws and fiscal objection to abortion expenses;
- safeguarding life in relation to the issues of euthanasia and living wills.

69. Service for Minors and Fostering

‘Giving a family to those who are without’ is the constant commitment of the Community.

Minors who are not able to live in their own natural families need to know that their life is important to someone and that they are chosen and loved in a unique and personal way. Allowing minors who have been temporarily moved away from their own family to be fostered by a heterosexual family or a family

home offers better conditions for their development and growth than placing them in an institution. The main aim of this Service is to promote and support a culture of welcoming in order to guarantee each child the right to live in a family by:

- dealing with the various requests for help received by the Community;
- finding families and family homes able to foster minors for the necessary length of time;
- promoting and participating in public meetings, training courses and conferences aimed at creating a culture of welcoming;
- cooperating and working together with other associations and public institutions on child protection initiatives.

70. Service for Conscientious Objection and Peace

Since its foundation, the Community has supported the recognition of the right to conscientious objection in two main ways: asking that civilian and military service be treated equally and asking for conscientious objectors to be able to participate in peace missions abroad.

This Service currently promotes, plans and runs the Servizio Civile Nazionale [National Civilian Service of Italy] within the Community, both in

Italy and abroad.

It also offers training and other activities on the themes of peace and nonviolence and promotes cooperation with various institutional bodies and civil society organisations, again working both in Italy and abroad.

Through the Go'el project, the Service promotes decentralised micro-actions of cooperation, aimed at supporting local groups who experience injustice and oppression and who, at grassroots level, fight for the recognition of their rights in a nonviolent way.

71. Operation Dove

'Building bridges and healing wounds' is the slogan of Operation Dove, a nonviolent peace corps which works on all war fronts, offering an alternative to armed intervention.

Its main features are:

active nonviolence, which is aimed at meeting 'the other' and which begins with friendship and understanding of his/her suffering in order to find a way to turn this suffering into hope and liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed;

sharing life with those suffering the worst effects of conflict;

neutrality towards both or all parties involved,

except where injustice is concerned.

The activities carried out in war areas are:
 living with the poor, helping them meet their basic needs and sharing in their uneasiness and fear;
 protecting the civilian population through our neutral and international presence, which helps deter the use of violence;
 promoting dialogue and reconciliation, which is realised by living on all fronts and is based on the trust people have in us.

72. Service for the Pastoral Care of Deaf People and their Families

This Service was created to increase our knowledge and deepen our understanding of the world and experience of deaf people and their families, including that of hearing children of deaf parents (C.O.D.A. - Children of Deaf Adults).

It aims to be the voice of the voiceless, a bridge between two worlds, and uses technology in order for us to be missionaries of Jesus to those living in silence by our side. It recognises the importance of sign language in ensuring that deaf people are not marginalised and have equal access to information.

The Service welcomes and supports deaf people and their families in different Community Areas

and asks states to officially recognise sign language as the language of the deaf community. On an ecclesiastical level, it asks for sign language to be recognised and used in pastoral work and liturgical events, in particular during the celebration of the Eucharist. Within the Community, the Service works to make audiovisual documents accessible to deaf people and creates audiovisual material using sign language, which can be used for the evangelisation of deaf people, especially children.

73. Service for Political Intervention

Every member of the Community should participate in the construction of the modern-day equivalent of the 'Polis', the 'city of men', in order to remove the causes of marginalisation and poverty. With this end in mind, the Community carries out its own political initiatives at local, national and international level.

The Community is not tied to any particular political ideology, party or coalition of parties. It tries to build constructive dialogue and collaboration with everyone in a nonviolent way and in accordance with the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Community's commitment to justice means that some of its members may be involved in political activity and work and may be present in places

where decisions are made which affect everybody's life, in particular the life of the least of those in society. These members act in a private capacity but discuss their work within the Community and ask for confirmation of it.

The Service supports these members and encourages contact between them. It also supports the other Community Services, as well as the entire Community, in helping to remove the causes of injustice and marginalisation around the world.

74. Service for Roma and Sinti

The Community is committed to working with the Roma and Sinti people and does so in accordance with the pastoral criteria of the teaching of the Church. It aims to:

- focus on expectations and difficulties in understanding the cultural situation;
- become a 'welcoming community' through its centres and work;
- fully share in the the life of Roma and Sinti "for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt" (Ad Gentes, 10).

The Service does all it can to help this people

move out of its undefined legal situation, and the prejudice and xenophobia this attracts, aiming, at the same time, to help Roma and Sinti maintain their cultural identity.

75. Service for Schools

Schools are fundamental to the development and growth of young people. They work best when all those involved (teachers, students and parents) are given the chance to participate in school life in an active and constructive way.

Schools must be fully inclusive and all students must be fully integrated into school life. Teaching activities must be planned to meet the needs of all students, particularly the weakest ones.

The Community promotes the model of the ‘School of Gratuitousness’, in which students are motivated not only by achieving high grades but also by the desire to learn and know, as well as by the desire to build positive relationships with others and learn from their individual gifts.

It is essential that all teachers, students and families belonging to the Community promote this idea of school in order to spread this way of thinking throughout society as a whole.

76. Service for Substance Abusers and Addicts

The phenomenon of substance abuse and addiction is fuelled by a society which has forgotten its roots and does not recognise or take into account its real needs. It is a society in which people seek ever more intense emotional experiences and highs. Many young people become 'consumers of emotions', slaves to what the market demands.

Since it began, this Service has developed and run programmes to help people recover from various kinds of pathological addiction. It places the importance of the human being at the centre of its work and focuses on all aspects of his/her person: physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Health interventions carried out during these programmes must always take into account this integral vision of the human being.

Numerous therapeutic centres for addicts have been opened. These work together with family homes and other centres of the Community in order to create personalised programmes which take into account the differences in age, personality, psychopathological problems and social situations of the people for whom they are designed.

The existence of these therapeutic centres in other countries where the Community is present is

particularly important. The General Coordinator of the Service and other project workers maintain constant contact with them.

The Service informs the whole Community about the tragedy of pathological addiction and the need to free people from it. Through conferences, speeches, and work in schools and other educational centres, it continues to contribute to the construction of a more people-oriented society.

B) SERVICES WHICH SUPPORT THE RUNNING OF THE COMMUNITY

77. Secretariat

The Secretariat is directly accountable to the President of the Community. It manages and organises meetings, conferences and events promoted by the Community, including the annual Assembly of the Association and the three-day Annual General Meeting. It is responsible for the distribution of all formative documents written and prepared by the Community, in particular by the President, and for their necessary translation into the principal languages spoken in the Community.

It manages the relationship between the Com-

munity and the media and ensures the immediate availability of the President when necessary. It also maintains the Community's website (www.apg23.org) and organises the publication of information packs.

The office organises the President's calendar and supports internal communication within the Community with regard to events taking place in the different Community Areas.

78. Administrative Offices

This Service manages the goods and deals with the administrative and financial affairs of the whole Community.

Since its work benefits all the activities the Community carries out with the aim of sharing life with others, it could more specifically be called 'Administrative Support of Sharing'.

The work of this Service is divided up into different areas. Each of these has a manager, who is in charge of the activities carried out under his/her jurisdiction and regularly reports on these to the General Coordinator of the Service. The latter ensures that these activities are being carried out in accordance with the vocation of the Community and that they respect the laws in force of the relevant countries. He/she, in turn, then reports on

these activities to the President, who must always be present when decisions are made.

The idea of being 'a single spiritual family' must permeate all the activities and work carried out by the Community. Nothing can operate outside this principle of communion and unity, especially the carrying out of administrative support.

One or more Area Coordinators of this Service are appointed in each Community Area by the Community Area Leader. They act as an interface between their Area and the Administrative Support of Sharing with regard to bureaucratic and administrative matters. The Service trains and follows them in their tasks. The General Coordinator of this Service always participates in the Leadership Council.

79. Fundraising

This Service is necessary for the support and development of the projects run by the Community. It operates in many different ways, coordinating activities which aim to raise not only funds but also awareness of the activities and work the Community carries out. In this way, an increasing number of people become involved in the mission of the Community itself. The Service helps people understand the po-

sitive value of sharing life directly with the least of those in society, supporting the poor and respecting Christian principles of human solidarity.

80. *Sempre* Publications

Since it began, the Community has placed a great deal of importance on the use of various forms of media in order to be the voice of the least of those in society and develop a culture of welcoming, as well as to expose cases of injustice. In addition to using already-existing media (newspapers, radio, television), the Community has its own publishing house, which produces various magazines and books.

The monthly magazine, *Sempre* [Forever], which was first published in 1977, is a way of informing and connecting members of the Community, supporters of the Community and all those interested in the development of a society which places sharing life with the least of its members at its heart.

The bimonthly booklet, *Pane Quotidiano* [Daily Bread], first published in 2002, is a very popular pocket-sized publication which offers the daily liturgical readings together with comments taken from Father Oreste Benzi's reflections and meditations.

Since 2005, the Community has also published various books on themes related to its work, its experience and the values it promotes.

81. APG23 Audiovisual Centre

This Service aims to communicate and increase understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the Community and how these are turned into action, as well as to create a culture based on this. The Service's main productions are based on the witness of Father Oreste Benzi, whose focused gaze represents the foundation and long-term view of all its communication projects.

Audio and video appliances are placed at the service of the Community and are used in two ways: to create a culture which helps remove the causes of injustice and to document the history of the Community. The archives of video files, which are constantly updated, are of great sentimental and cultural importance to the whole Community.

The Service's different productions have different qualities, formats and destinations. They include documentaries and promotional spots for local and national television stations, video clips and interviews for local and national television programmes, DVDs to be distributed by hand or in bookshops,

DVDs for internal communication and formation in the Community, audio and video services for conventions and conferences, and videos destined for the internet.

82. Documentation Centre

The Documentation Centre is to the Community what the memory is to a human being. Without it, we would not be able to look back over the entire path of the Community and would therefore not be able to fully understand our vocation or the spiritual and cultural heritage we have acquired over the years.

The fundamental purpose of the Documentation Centre is to create an archive of the history of the Community and of the life, work and thinking of its founder, Father Oreste Benzi.

The work of this Service also includes running a book and newspaper library; cataloguing books, magazines, newspapers and audio, video and text files, and converting documents into digital formats.

CHAPTER VIII

Entities promoted by the Community

83. *The Condividere Papa Giovanni XXIII Consortium*

During the years, the Community has promoted the setting up of various entities, in Italy and abroad, in order to better meet the juridical, legal, administrative and financial needs which arise as a result of sharing our lives directly with the least of those in society.

In particular, it has promoted the ‘Condividere Papa Giovanni XXIII’ Consortium [‘Pope John XXIII Sharing’ Consortium] as an instrument which allows cooperatives and other bodies established in Italy through the work of the Community to operate in union with the vocation of the Community and with one another.

Cooperatives are real companies which aim to live in accordance with the principles of the Society of Gratuitousness. They show that these principles are financially sustainable. Cooperatives offer a way

for the vocation of the Community to be lived out within a working environment. Good must be done well. Working hours must be respected, work must be carried out in a competent and professional way, different roles must be respected and everything must be done with love. The choice to share life is not usually limited to the space of a working day: we also look for ways to share life outside of working hours.

The decision of a member of the Community to live out the vocation in this way and become a member of a cooperative has to be confirmed by the relevant Community Area Leader and the President of the Community. In order to favour communion and unity, the person in charge of a cooperative is normally the Leader of the Community Area in which the cooperative has its main office and the President of the Consortium is the President of the Community.

84. The *Condivisione fra i Popoli* Association

The Community also promotes the ‘Condivisione fra i Popoli’ Association [‘Sharing among Peoples’ Association], an ONLUS [Non-Profit Organisation of Social Utility]. This was established in 1989, and acknowledged as a non-governmental organisa-

tion (NGO) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1999, in order to allow the Community to run its projects abroad more effectively and with official recognition. The purpose of the Association is to support development work around the world, helping people become autonomous through running and supporting development projects, organising fundraising activities and campaigns, and running awareness-raising and educational activities.

Together with the Community, the Association promotes activities to prevent the terrible consequences of hunger, homelessness, marginalisation, life on the street, epidemics, prostitution, armed conflicts and the neglect and abandonment of minors. It intervenes in areas of need, including nutrition, education and health, and offers vocational training, micro-finance programmes and peace education. It helps remove the causes of marginalisation through awareness-raising activities in Italy and abroad and, in collaboration with the Catholic Church and local NGOs, it participates in activities aimed at promoting justice at local, national and international level.

CHAPTER IX

Bodies which support Community life

85. Assembly of the Association

The Assembly of the Association, constituted in accordance with Article 10 of the Statutes, normally gathers in conjunction with, or in the days immediately before, the three-day Annual General Meeting, which all members of the Community and those carrying out their PVV are called to attend, in accordance with Point 30 of this Directory.

Community Area Delegates participate in the Assembly as representatives of their Community Areas. One or more meetings should be arranged before the Assembly, possibly during Community Days, so that members of the relevant Community Area can express their opinions and suggest matters to be introduced at the Assembly itself.

Community Area Delegates must take account of these issues and bring them to the attention of the Assembly.

However, they carry out their duties without a binding mandate.

In accordance with Article 12e of the Statutes, decisions of the Assembly only become final after they are confirmed by the President.

86. President

The President exercises the service of confirmation and guidance along the vocational path⁷¹. By carrying out the functions established in Article 12 of the Statutes, he/she offers support and encouragement and supervises orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

The President visits the different Community Areas to support and confirm the members of the Community in the vocation, meeting them on a one-to-one basis or through his/her meetings with the various Community Services and centres.

In collaboration with the Community Area Leaders, the President informs the different Community Areas about the life of the Community through quarterly letters, *Sempre* magazine and the secretariat.

⁷¹ See FC, chap. 2, The Five Elements of the Vocation, 4. Allowing oneself to be led in obedience.

87. Vice President

In accordance with Article 13 of the Statutes, the Vice President, upon being given an explicit mandate by the President, can carry out the functions of the President both inside and outside the Community. In particular, the Vice President chairs the Leadership Council if the President is absent or temporarily unavailable.

88. Leadership Council

The Leadership Council is responsible for evaluating the running of the different activities of the Community, as well as evaluating the opening of new activities and considering any suggestions and proposals made. It does this on a monthly basis. It is responsible for making all decisions related to the above in accordance with Article 14 of the Statutes. These decisions must be confirmed by the President in accordance with Article 12e of the same.

The Leadership Council makes decisions regarding interpretation of the Statutes and approves regulations to be applied in specific, individual circumstances.

In order to realise the aim of walking together as a single spiritual family, the Leadership Council does everything necessary to enable the participa-

tion of all Community Area Leaders in its meetings, including setting up teleconferencing. If and when consulted, members of the Community can also give their opinions about matters to be discussed, using information technology when necessary. The Leadership Council must take these opinions into account.

In order to inform the Community of decisions which are made, the secretary of the Leadership Council takes detailed minutes of the meetings. These are kept in a book, together with previous minutes, which can be accessed by the members of the Council. An edited version is also produced, which is made available to the members of the Community through the relevant Community Area Leader.

CONCLUSION

89. Institution at the service of charism

We, as the Community of Pope John XXIII, aim to remain attentive that the institution is always at the service of the charism. We remain open to the Spirit who, through our life shared directly with the poor and lived out following Jesus, poor and servant, constantly brings forward new prophets in our midst, in accordance with the needs of the present time.⁷²

Throughout his life, Father Oreste Benzi, founder of the Community of Pope John XXIII and a priest in the Diocese of Rimini, showed how the Church cares deeply for the poor by sharing life directly with them and helping to remove the causes of marginalisation.

He made evident those charisms which are given to the people of God through the Holy Spirit.

⁷² See homily of Father Oreste Benzi of 08/01/2000.

Following Jesus, poor and servant, in communion with our bishops, is a gift which brings us comfort and a gift we are grateful to receive.

Father Oreste was a 'tireless apostle of charity'⁷³. He carried the Gospel all over the world to the 'little ones' and the least of those in society, those most dearly loved by the Heavenly Father.

Mary was his mother and he entrusted himself to her with gratitude and joy.

The whole Community gives thanks to God for his witness to our common vocation to holiness.

⁷³ As defined by Pope Benedict XVI in the telegram sent by Cardinal Tarciso Bertone on 02/11/2007.