

**You will shine in the World
like Bright Stars**

Ph 2, 15-16

**Reflection on the Identity and Mission
of Faith and Light**



Faith and Light, forty years...

It is not only with our enthusiasm, but with all our Christian commitment that, after forty years we take care and we protect a small oasis of freshness and joy, Faith and Light.

Despite all the progress made in various countries, the person with an intellectual disability is still too often put aside. He/she is seen as an embarrassment, a disturbance, a burden. He/she is still too often isolated...

Governed by the law of the strongest, societies challenge our hopes. We cannot deny the challenge, without falling into a false optimism.

Faith and Light, this ecosystem of peace, is still proposing a counter-cultural message, and communities, after forty years are still very fragile.

During its short history, Faith and Light has followed roads that were as much surprising as unplanned pathways of hope for thousands of people around the world. Today, if we want to 'Shine in the world like bright stars' we not only need to look back at the journey, but also to return to our initial inspiration, to what is fundamental.

*In 1971, in Lourdes, we did not ask for the healing of intelligence,
We ask for the healing of hearts.⁶*

“Your passport!..” demanded the customs officer with a gruff voice.

And timidly, the traveler, suddenly doubting of his own honesty, presented his identity paper... A few moments of suspense... An inquisitive look... then clic-clac, the stamp is affixed. ‘Whew!’ What a relief to know that we are recognized without confusion, as a person, citizen of a country.

Affirming our identity...

What is my family, where are my origins, what is our history?

This is a vital and persistent need of all people, all communities, all societies and all eras: the need to take root in a history, in a specific part of the world, in a specific culture. The need to be grounded somewhere, a port of belonging, a niche where to rest and find peace. The need to belong to a group, to believe in a common ideal...

Our world encourages two types of extreme responses, one as insidious as the other:

The first one consists in erasing colors, nuances, particularities. There is no more reference point. People can be one thing today, another tomorrow. Relationships crumble. There is an endless stream of opinions offered, on every possible topic, even about life’s more essential moral and ethical questions, and the impression that nothing is fixed, or true, or right, or even can be.¹

The second one consists in digging in one’s heels, to shut oneself up in a set of beliefs and ways of doing things. There is a danger of gradually slipping into sectarianism, fundamentalism, and, in extreme cases, violence. This type of response inevitably generates isolation, and even intolerance.

To affirm one’s identity in such a context, raises a challenge that oscillates between two extremes: the risk of losing our originality and our reason for being in opening more to the outside world or the risk of closing up and isolating ourselves in order to protect ourselves. Faith and Light is not immune to these questions: will we lose our flavour or will we seize the opportunity to renew ourselves?

Toward a renewed identity...

This booklet is addressed to the Faith and Light Communities. It aims at helping them to accompany their reflection on what is essential to Faith and Light and thereby to affirm them in their specific identity and vocation.

There is a main thread running through the various pages of this

This main thread presents a conception of the world based on relationships where the most needy persons and specifically persons with an intellectual disability, bring a contribution to our societies. It presents a world in which God is present in each one of us specifically in our relationships. Persons with an intellectual disability are the privileged witnesses of this way of being, and if we know how to enter into a relationship with them, they reveal this Presence in a particular way.

booklet, and each chapter represents variations on this theme.

Each one of the chapters proposes very simple questions that may be difficult to answer because they require a radical change: what success, what social achievement is compatible with our values? Where is performance, the selfishness, competition in the ecosystem of God?

What are the ingredients? There is no magic answer that we can give once and for all to these questions, but if we take the risk of being questioned, we will learn, as persons and as communities, to progress together toward a renewed identity.

Several texts of this booklet come from documents and conferences of Faith and Light. They have been regrouped under catchy, easy to remember titles. In many ways they illustrate the values in the Charter of Faith and Light.



Like small ponds in the jungle of our world, our communities constitute fragile ecosystems that need to be protected because they are essential to the life of our societies.

What is fundamental

This section describes the unique gift of Faith and Light, what gives life

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Called to bear fruit

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What is fundamental _____

I— A call of God who accompanies us

A call

On rare occasions will a person join a community by accident. Some join a community because they met a person, or because they were asked to help, or because it is a result of a spiritual journey.

One comes back to Faith and Light because he/she has created links, established a relationship, and has perceived a call which is beyond understanding.

This call is perceived by the poorest who are the first to be chosen by God, by friends who accompany them, by families who discover a new meaning to their life. Wherever we are, we will stay in Faith and Light only if we understand that we are responding to the call of Jesus who invites us to something mysterious, a beautiful secret, to grow in love. ²

*“You did not choose me, no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last.”*
Jn 15, 16

God accompanies us

When difficult situations arise, when we worry, when we are not recognized, we react in a wide variety of ways: guilt, criticism, shame, discouragement, resignation, a sense of injustice, anger. These responses bring us far from our center, an area where God resides, and prevent us from seeing God in others.

In Faith and Light we learn to see in all others, and specifically in those who are disabled, persons where God resides, persons rich with gifts to be shared and with whom we grow in love. In our world of individualism and competition that pushes us to have more and better, Faith and Light proposes to turn toward the smallest, the humble, the wounded, those who are put aside by society.





This evolution requires a personal reflection, involves a lot of humility, a dying to one's own interests, and growing in love.

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Discovering our way of life

Through our personal prayer, and by sharing and listening attentively to others, we experience more deeply the paths of the Holy Spirit, how the Spirit is manifest and working within our lives, where the Spirit is leading us. What are the signs in my life that tell me that God is calling me? What are those which indicate that God accompanies me?

Finding God in the other, the essential link between us

Being convinced that others, and specifically the persons with an intellectual disability have an incredible thirst for God and want to share this treasure... How can I find God in others?

Being fruitful for one another

Living fully means embarking on a journey in which we believe that God is calling us, in our fragility, to be fruitful for one another. We cannot transmit our faith, we can only propose to share it. What is the call that makes me fruitful to others?

What is fundamental

2— Reciprocity in equal relationship

Our society has a tendency to establish a distinction between those who win and those who lose, to establish a distance between those who carry a responsibility and the others; to promote competition and to encourage achievement and success, and to push people to go up the ladder and win.

The only greatness accessible to all...

God never stops waiting for us in our profound intimacy, deep inside ourselves: this is what constitutes the equality between persons, because in this privileged space we find the only greatness accessible to all, whatever our weakness, visible or not. No need to have a social position or special capacity. No ethnic group, religion, culture or position gives to one more value than to the other.

Each one of us is a unique and precious person, who has an exceptional value in the eyes of God. Consequently, what is important is to witness an extraordinary respect to one another.

The image of the Trinity

Like the Trinity, no one in the community acts alone:

Families/parents – image of the Father, creating, caring, providing, minding, leading.

Persons with an intellectual disability – image of the Son, broken, vulnerable, pushed aside, loving to the depths and to the end.

Friends – image of the Spirit, who brings life, youth, energy, renewing and re-creating.

They are all turned towards each other: their dance is perfectly mutual and exhibits in each an others-towards-ness, a reciprocal loving 'enjoyment'. A mystery beyond comprehension, yet imaged in no small way by our communities.¹

"Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

Mt 20,26



The person with an intellectual disability helps us to discover our own fruitful fragility that transforms. His/her vulnerability helps us discover our own vulnerabilities. Our friends who have disabilities invite us to discover our own spiritual possibilities. If we listen, they help us discover a new disposition for delicacy and love.

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

No power or domination among us

In what way does my generosity place me in a position of superiority over the other one? What are the privileges that I am looking for and are associated with the responsibility that I have in Faith and Light? What is my real motivation to serve the weak?

Giving the other the medal of honour

How can I reveal to the others that they are precious? What prevents me from seeing the star shining in the other one?

Witnessing an extraordinary respect for the other

What can I do to help others who contact me to grow in freedom? How can I learn to witness an extraordinary respect for the other one?

Becoming an instrument of God

When I am proud of my competence and I am doing things to help others, am I still an instrument of God or am I giving for my own satisfaction?

What is fundamental

3— The support of a community

To have a child with a disability is still perceived today as a bad fruit on the tree. Rightly, nobody wants to be in such a situation. When they are told that their child is disabled, parents do not know what to do; it is very difficult to imagine the immensity of their pain.³

Most of the time we are alone and powerless in dealing with suffering. It is difficult to find a shoulder that can support us.

Furthermore, in a society that generates isolation and where all is temporary and disposable, it is very difficult to commit yourself to a person for a long time. Belonging to a group might involve losing our freedom. Faithfulness toward persons is often perceived as restrictive and suffocating. The modern ideal of freedom does not encourage any form of vocation or commitment.

I am not alone...

The support of a community becomes essential for everyone, as much for persons with an intellectual disability as for their families and their friends. When we really form a community, it is possible to break isolation, to remove the sense of shame and guilt. When I am welcomed in my differences, what was so shameful or terrible before becomes something that is easier to accept. The community teaches me to stop hiding behind certainties and securities that condemn, but to enter in relationship and to better know those who are different. When I am doubting and discouraged, I realize that I am not alone, that others believe in me.

The unique composition of our communities

In Faith and Light, we insist a lot on what constitutes the three pillars of the community: the person with an intellectual disability, the members of their family and their friends. All are important and all mutually nourish friendly relationships of friendship among themselves.

The persons with an intellectual disability reveal themselves and shine in a network of faithful people through Faith and Light. The members of the family find support to face their challenges and are consoled by discovering the internal beauty of their child. Friends discover that there is another universe than the one of power, competition, and money. The person with an intellectual disability opens the way to a world of tenderness, fidelity, listening and faithfulness. This unique network of persons creates a place where we share the pains and the joys and where we can grow one for the other and together, by sharing our hope. It is not only a question of being kind to one another, but to discover together a meaning to life.

Jesus is telling us something new

Having power, controlling everything and stooping to be generous from a position of strength are neither the Godly nor the truly human way of being.¹

It is not a question of doing good for the poor, but of being healed by the poor. To enter in communion with the poor changes us, transforms us, makes us more human. It constitutes the journey toward God. Jesus proposes a new and counter-cultural vision which is at the heart of the Gospel.³



"I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead."
Ez 36,26

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Learning to be faithful

To grow with a community is to learn how to become faithful. How do I maintain a relationship which allows others to break their isolation? How can the community help me to become faithful?

Following a path together...

The community is fully alive when it gives energy to its members. Are we, together on the way? Where are we? Did we stop walking together? In what way does the community Faith and Light help us to be nourished along our path to God?

The place and the value of friends

Friends are important for the community. What responsibilities do they carry and how do we show that we trust them? What demonstrates that friends are not only volunteers?

Becoming a model for one another

Faith is contagious in a community which is fully alive. When I have doubts, are the members of the community a model of faithfulness, generosity, tenderness? At some other time, will it be my turn to become the model?

What is fundamental _____

4— Truthfulness in relationships

Many people in our society have enough of a life that is stressful, competitive, characterized by facade and by the loss of authentic relationships. They want a simpler and more relational life. Being together and at the same time being more oneself. Reducing the distance between strong and competent people who succeed and weaker ones who do not have a place. At the heart of each one of us, there is this profound aspiration to be truthful, to engage in transparent relationships, to break down barriers of race, religion, social status...



A new way of being human

There is no method, no magic recipe, there is no trick. It is a journey that moves me to freed from my selfishness, the self-made fixed definitions and the sectarian attitudes that take me away from the other: if God resides in each one of us and especially in the most needy persons, then there cannot be any distinction of class, race and sex... I can escape from a hierarchical environment, enter the playground of equal relationships where I am not obsessed by my own priorities. In this universe, I am sincerely interested in what happens to others and together we learn to know each other.

The spontaneity of people with a disability, their inner freedom, their joy of welcoming, their happiness, the simplicity that emerges from their heart, reveal another way of being in our society. In a mysterious way, they can help us to break down the barriers that divide, and help us discover a different way of being human.³

It is only in these authentic relationships that I meet God.



"Let the little children come to me." Mark 10, 13-16



When it comes to celebration the person with an intellectual disability is often less disabled than others, because he/she is not imprisoned by convention, worry about efficiency or fear of what others may think. People with disabilities live more simply the present moment; their humility and transparency make them naturally disposed towards community festivity.⁵

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Stopping and being filled with wonder

Can I stop and be filled with wonder? Wonder is this magic moment when I am healed and delivered from myself. I am immersed in a presence that fills me. How can the person with an intellectual disability help me to be in the 'here and now'?

Freeing yourself from selfishness

Much concern of survival is overwhelming in such a world of comparisons, where the obsession of having or losing is omnipresent. What am I afraid of losing or lacking if I enter in close friendship with someone else?

Learning to become transparent

When we focus on the essential, we can say with love and humility what we feel and perceive. How can I learn to free myself from the certitudes and securities that condemn and open myself to difference?

Rediscovering spontaneity

Together, we will not be moulded by the wishes, the roles, the rules that we can mutually impose on each other or that others can impose on us. In what way am I the slave of what others think about me?

What is fundamental

5— Being the friend of a rejected person

In Faith and Light, we are not called to organize activities for persons with an intellectual disability, we are called to become their friends.

"I shall no longer call you servants, I call you friends." Jn 15, 15

A different perspective...

It is only when we enter into relationship with the weakest, that we also become vulnerable, because we start to love. Such love is the way. We need it, and the world needs it; and as Faith and Light shows, it is received freely from those who have nothing to lose but who in fact have what the rest of us could have lost: hearts full of love. This paradox is at the heart of our identity: we receive far more from those we try to reach, than what we will ever be able to give.¹



*In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10,36), the lawyer asks who is his neighbour?
Jesus responds by asking who is the neighbour of the wounded person?
The perspective has changed...*

It is very difficult to be with a person whose gestures are bizarre, whose words are difficult to understand or who express great anxiety, because they awaken our own anxieties, our own difficulties. The instinctive reaction is to run away, to reject. We are afraid of what we do not know, afraid of not knowing what to do, afraid of the time that we will lose: we run away because this brings us back to our own fragilities.⁶

This is why the drama of the person with an intellectual disability is not the handicap itself, but isolation: this is the cry for friendship. Besides, is this drama not a reality for each one of us? Many people have all that they want and are willing to give or to help, but only a few have enough compassion to take time to listen, to take time to be a friend.

A mysterious power springs from the heart of the person with an intellectual disability and calls us to a relationship, to a transformation of heart that could be the beginning of a new way of living in our societies.



Friendship is built upon mutual respect. It consists in learning to be faithful and growing together.

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Committing myself in relationships of friendship

How can I become the friend of a person with an intellectual disability? How do I become the friend of a parent who has a child with a disability? What are the relationship in which I really commit myself?

Discovering my own disabilities

It is possible for me to maintain a relationship of friendship with an other person only when there is reciprocity. Am I open to what I find strange in me, to what is different, broken or rejected, disabled or weak? What can help me to accept my own disabilities?

Accepting to become vulnerable

The road of friendship is a long journey that requires spiritual growth and in which I explore my own difficulties to enter into relationships, my fears, my instincts. What are the vulnerabilities that emerge in me when I meet a person with an intellectual disability?

Lighting a spark

How can I light the spark that activates the energy for growth and triggers the possibilities in the other? How can I make the other shine? How can the flames of the person with an intellectual disability ignite me?

The essential ingredients of our action

1 - Discernment

It is a tradition in Faith and Light to elect new coordinators in a climate of discernment. Over time, we even came to call the election process « Discernment ». In reality, to discern is searching for the will of the Spirit in our actions, whatever they are. This is much larger than just the context of elections.

Developing an attitude of discernment, is to recognize that God brings us together and that He is the authority. This requires listening to each person, and through our prayer, to discover the will of God for each one of us and for our communities. We become available to the call and we welcome it in humility and openness. It is at this level of inwardness that God talks to us and animates us.⁷

We can experience this discernment in a personal manner (through the person with an intellectual disability, how does God call me to commit myself) or in a collective manner (as a community, how can we identify the calls in order to exercise responsibilities?)

The authority among us

In Faith and Light, we believe that God is present in every person, however humble, wounded or different. This calls us to respect ourselves, to welcome our own vulnerability and fragility. When we try to discover the path of God in our life, we affirm our image of God. We understand that He is the one who brings us together and who is the authority among us.



The objects of our discernment

1. Our identity

In Faith and Light, the most profound consensus is seen on the level of our shared identity. Rooted in a common history, members of communities and coordination teams discover gradually what makes us unique. The more they welcome this Gift, the more alive, united and fruitful they are.

2. The call that moves us to bear fruit together

Each one of us possesses an appeal and a gift for a specific commitment. It is an orientation of our own being, written deeply inside, an invitation to deploy ourselves and blossom in our relationship with others and becoming closer to ourselves. It is not always easy to hear and respond to this call.⁷

In the same manner, the Faith and Light communities and coordination teams receive a call: a call to reveal the gift of persons with a disability, a call to break down barriers between people, between Churches, between nations.

3. The essential ingredients of our action

We refer here to the means which help to realize our call. Our decisions are taken in an attitude of discernment, and the means are regularly adjusted to reality, which is constantly changing.

Reflection paths

Who are we in the eyes of God?

When I look at my own history and at what is happening for me today, how can I recognize my grace, my unique gift ? How can I define it ? If I had to express my identity by a symbol or a picture, what would I choose ?⁷

What am I called for?

To realize my identity and, so to bear fruit in abundance, what are the calls that I perceive being made upon me today? What is already helping me respond to these calls and bear fruit? What should I implement in the near future?⁷

How to discern the gifts of each one of us?

Given the reality in which my community lives and the projects we have to carry out, I ask the grace to better realise the gifts of one another in order to encourage them to bear fruit and to help the community grow.

The essential ingredients of our action

2 - The meetings

The communities of Faith and Light are communities of meeting. They are a place where we can be ourselves, feeling loved and being recognized for who we are. This is where we find peace and inner joy.

The communities also want to support parents who have so often been hurt by life, who are so courageous in facing difficulties. In a climate of sharing and friendship, our communities allow us to comfort and reassure each other. Some have discovered there the true face of their child, the beauty of his/her heart. Friends discover a different manner of living in society, based on the value of the heart, tenderness, friendship, attention to the other.

Each meeting includes times for getting together for sharing, for celebrating, and for prayer.

Sharing

“Sharing in small groups enables each person to express him/herself through words or other forms of communication, e.g. drawings, modelling, mimes or gestures. In this way, we seek to “be with”, carrying one another’s burdens, to encourage and support each other and to respond to the needs of each one. Through friendship, made up of tenderness and fidelity, we become signs of the love of God for one another.”⁵

Fiesta and celebration

“Meetings are characterized by moments of joy when we sing or dance or share a meal”,⁵ when we celebrate life because we are loved by God, when we sing our thanksgiving. We are called to be persons of celebration in a world where there is a lot of depression, suffering resentment and crisis.³

Prayer

The human gathering and celebration find their completion in prayer, communion with God, in liturgical celebrations where we are called to be one.³ The washing of the feet in particular is an important symbolic gesture in Faith and Light. It reveals our aspiration to forgive, to be forgiven, to serve in humility. By this gesture, Jesus tells us to serve each other with love and caring. It shows us how to spiritually bend our knees in front of our brothers and sisters, especially those who are the weakest. This also has a specific meaning in relation to unity. If we cannot always have communion together in the same Eucharist with our brothers and sisters from other denominations, we can be united with them by the washing of the feet.

We are very different from communities that are there to evangelize. We are communities that welcome people. We develop relationships of friendship and support. We mutually accompany each other when our hearts are broken, when we are in sorrow or vulnerable.



Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Being a gift for others

When I am I a gift for others, I bring what I am without trying to know if I succeed better than others. I use my gifts without the fear of failure. There is no comparison or measure of progress or achievement. What will be my contribution, how today? How can I make a difference today?

Energizing meetings

There is no better community than the community to which I belong today. What makes me exhausted or full of energy at the end of a meeting? How can I instil energy in our meetings?

Allowing others to exercise their gifts

In what manner are our meetings really a place of celebration? How are they allowing everyone to be him/herself, to share and to exercise their gifts? How are they allowing us to meet God?

The essential ingredients of our action

3— Support to the family

In spite of all the organisations that offer support to persons with an intellectual disability, there are still today many parents who are ashamed of the handicap of their child and isolate themselves by cutting all contacts with society. It is important to let these families know that Faith and Light is a community where their child and themselves will be able to overcome isolation and meet other persons who have blossomed in spite of their difficult situation. They can receive in the community moral and spiritual support.

Our Faith and Light communities allow persons with an intellectual disability and their families to express what they experience, to be listened to, understood and loved. It is important to allow these persons talk about their suffering.

Jesus said that the parents are not to blame and that the person with a handicap is born in order that the work of God be manifested in him.

Jn 9, 1-3



**Whatever their handicap,
persons with a disability
are aware of being rejected.**

To become a Witness

To welcome a child with a disability is not the concern only of the parents, but of the whole community, of the society.⁶

The presence of friends in our communities is essential.

They are the witnesses and faithful agents of solidarity. Their enthusiastic witness illustrates that it is possible to break down the barriers between people; they open the windows that allow joy to come in. For them, coming to Faith and Light is not a duty or a voluntary work, nor a means to achieve personal success, but a journey that transforms their vision of the world little by little.

“Those who are weak and poor invite friends into a world of tenderness and fidelity, of listening and of faith.”⁵

Trusting the future

Parents who are isolated, often excluded and ashamed, find in Faith and Light a place where their child is accepted as he/she is and where he/she can reveal his/her gifts. They are not alone anymore. The link of friendship developed during the monthly meetings, generates bonds between meetings. They regain trust in the future. As their way of seeing their child changes, they discover that their child is fully a person, has his/her place in the community, in the Church and in society.

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Being present to young families

Being attentive to the different psychological stages that parents of a young child go through: accepting the child with a disability, adapting to the challenge, growing in this new reality. How can we be present in listening and accompanying?

Reaching parents who have a young child

How can we reach the parents who have a young child with an intellectual disability, who do not know Faith and Light and who need to find meaning for their child's life?

Being present with older parents

How can we share in the challenges and difficulties of the child who has grown into adulthood? In the future of the child after the loss of parents?

The essential ingredients of our action

4— Times of friendship

Bonds of friendship between parents and friends, between friends and a person with an intellectual disability allow each one to slowly change their perception of life.

From one meeting to the next, from event to event, everyone learns to let down the barriers that close their heart. We become faithful to friendship when we hear a call and we commit ourselves in a relationship that makes us grow. The time that we spend together allows us to discover a new way of being human, a new relationship with God through the weakest.



Privileged time together

A visit, a phone call, going to the restaurant and to the movie theatre are only a few examples of privileged times where we learn to accept each other as we are, being attentive to our fragilities, and taking care of one other.

It is when I can live the 'here and now' with the other person that I learn to grow, to reveal my beauty, my gift. This is valid not only for the parent and the friend, but also for the person with an intellectual disability.

Each one learns his/her own value and learns that he/she can be a presence for the other. The relationship becomes a source of healing that allows us to discover the presence of God.

Going together...

Going together to a summer camp, on a pilgrimage... We can go to accompany and provide a service, to exercise a gift. It can be the occasion to visit a new place... This is often the way friends get to know Faith and Light.

But going together is in fact an excellent occasion to test one's character. It is the time where we reveal our qualities and weaknesses to one another, where we get to know each other more intimately.

A summer camp or a pilgrimage is an intense moment where we mutually discover how unique and irreplaceable we are. Taking the time to listen, to follow the rhythm of the weakest allows us to perceive the presence of God. Each is healed of his/her prejudices and learns to accept his/her vulnerabilities.

If we are faithful in this relationship of compassion, we discover that our heart is transformed and that, when we thought that we were giving, we receive. A very mysterious change happens in our heart.⁶

Reflection paths

Being available...

In what way does my generosity (preparing things for others...) prevent me from being present and available to the weakest person? How can I welcome the gift of the other, listen to him/her, follow his/her rhythm, and thus perceive the presence of God?

Spending time ...

I get to know the other only by spending time with him/her. How do I take the time to listen, to enter in an exchange heart to heart ?

Going together...

At summer camp, on pilgrimage... Is it for me a time where the other person reveals his/her personal and prophetic gifts, with his/her weaknesses and thirst for love? How can we discover that we are mutually filled with the presence of God?

The essential ingredients of our action

5— Ecumenism

Faith and Light was born in the Catholic Church. It is clear however that its inspiration is not specific to this Church. Its foundation and its spirituality are based on the Gospel. Faith and Light is founded on Jesus' word and on his love for people with disabilities.⁴

By welcoming people from other denominations in Catholic communities since the first pilgrimage in 1971 and then by seeing the creation of communities in other Churches, Faith and Light gradually discovered the capacity of the poor and the weak to call families, communities, Churches, nations and the whole humankind to form one single body.⁴

When Christians from different Churches begin to know each other, to love each other and to discover what unites them, they are filled with joy, but this joy is often accompanied by suffering when they realize what divides them: theological divergences, traditions, different languages and sometimes prejudices and a mutual lack of knowledge of each other.⁴



We have the mission of walking together,
we, Christians from different denominations,
and discovering the beauty
that we can bring to each other.

To become a Witness

We are a movement in our Churches, inspired by faith and inserted into the life of its parishes or communities of faith. We have a mission of unity and our visible presence witnesses through the way in which we enter into relationship with one another.¹

In countries where there are interdenominational communities or communities which belong to different Churches, the leaders of Faith and Light are encouraged to maintain a dialogue with

the priest or pastor who has responsibility for ecumenical issues in those Churches⁴.

An opportunity for dialogue is gently knocking at the door and invites us to listen more carefully to these friendly voices.



Reflection paths

Discovering what unites us

We are called to discover in each other, whatever our denomination, all that unites us. How can we find the language, the expressions, the gestures, the ceremonies, the prayers that lead to a great unity without hiding our differences? ⁴

Accepting others as they are

A prerequisite for living ecumenism is thus an acceptance of others as they are. Our work in Faith and Light is to welcome one another and to see in the heart of each one the love of God who dwells there. The welcome of all sorts of people awakens us to what is different and predisposes us to ecumenism.⁴ How can we be faithful to the Holy Spirit and in humility ask for forgiveness from members of other Churches for our prejudices, lack of respect, lack of welcoming and lack of love?

Being rooted in our own Church

This attitude of openness should be accompanied by a deeper understanding of one's own Church, its nature, its beliefs, all that characterizes it, and the way it understands its ecumenical vision.⁴ By our presence, how can we become a source of reconciliation, understanding and unity in our own Church?

The essential ingredients of our action

6— A big international family

Faith and Light is present in more than 80 countries around the world, in a great variety of cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Faith and Light communities offer a kaleidoscope of witnesses, as much related to the variety of activities, of places, as to the way of expressing ourselves...

The contribution of Faith and Light in our societies takes on local colours and is adapted to different cultural realities.



Jesus came to give us a common identity, apart from the divisions of race, colour, nation... He brought a new perspective: the person with an intellectual disability is very fragile and human, and is the temple of God.³

We know the beautiful text of the wedding feast. (Luke 14) Jesus says « When you give a really good banquet, invite the poor, the lame, the disabled, the blind, and you shall be blessed ». These are very nice words. You will be transformed, you will be entering the Kingdom of love. Blessed are you Father for having hidden these things from the intelligent, the clever, and revealed them to the little ones.³



The international organisation

The participants in the General Assembly represent the members of the Faith and Light movement from all over the world. First and last authority of the movement, it reflects the experience of the movement and its concerns, and establishes large strategic orientations.

The movement is divided into Provinces: “They are the branches of the international family and bring together between 15 and 40 recognized communities.”⁵



“Within each province, we carry one another’s burdens, sufferings and joys. Solidarity is expressed by sharing financial support for the life of Faith and Light but also by sharing the benefits of their particular gifts, their friendship, the wisdom of their experience, and their faithfulness in prayer. As members of a single family, communities seek to live in love and unity.”⁵

Reflection paths

Messengers of Joy

Discovering unity

We are called to another type of unity: that of compassion, presence with the smallest, peace between nations. How can the person with an intellectual disability be a witness of peace in our society?

Supporting each other

Faith and Light is a wide international family. How is my community assuming this responsibility in order to really support other communities around the world?

Call to bear fruit

1. Reveal the gift of persons with an intellectual disability

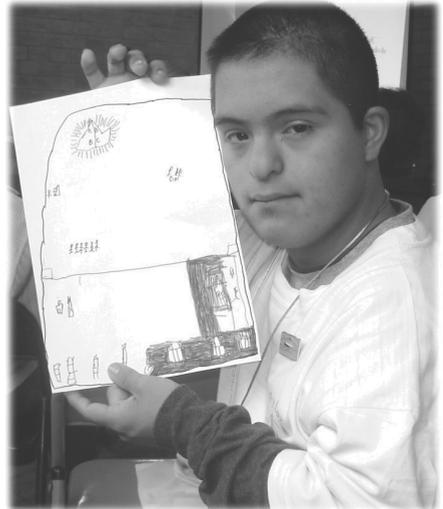
To persons with an intellectual disability

“Faith and Light gives the possibility of being recognized as unique persons, and using their gifts and discovering the joy of friendship.”⁵

To parents,

“Faith and Light gives support in their trials and helps them to better appreciate the inner beauty of their children. A number of them, in turn, become a source of strength and an assistance to other parents who are crushed by their suffering and their daily difficulties”.

The brothers and sisters of the people with an intellectual disability are called to appreciate that a person with a disability can be a source of life and unity; if this person disrupts their life, he/she can also transform and transfigure it.”⁵



To friends,

“Faith and Light helps them understand that there is another world, a world other than that of competition, money and success; those who are weak and poor invite them into a world of tenderness and fidelity, of listening and of faith.”⁵

Together we form a Faith and Light Community,
where each one welcomes his/her own weakness and meets the other in his/her's.
We witness that 's where God is waiting for us.

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Mt 25,40

2. To witness to the Churches...

On the essential place of persons with learning disabilities at the heart of Christian communities

We recognize that the most needy persons are essential in Christian communities and have a vital place in the Church.

On the necessity of the community to deepen our faith

“In order to live his/her faith, everyone, even the person with the most severe disability, needs to meet real friends in order to create together a warm environment in which each one may grow in faith and love. Those who come to Faith and Light to meet people with intellectual disabilities must come in a spirit of receiving from them their specific gifts while sharing their own gifts with them.”⁵

“In spite of and through suffering, the community becomes a place of peace and joy, mediator or revealer of the gifts that God has given to those with an intellectual disability: that is their capacity for welcome and for love, their simplicity and their rejection of conventions.”⁵

On the necessity to walk together

We, Christians of different denominations, have the mission to walk together and to discover what we can bring to each other.

Reflection paths

“Faith and Light believes that the person who is weak and disabled can become a source of unity in society and in each Church and also between Churches and nations.”⁵

Messengers of Joy

Becoming competent

“In order to help people with intellectual disabilities to find peace of heart, hope and the desire to grow, it is certainly necessary to see them in the light of the Gospel, but also to understand their human needs in their suffering, and to know how to respond. For this, we must gradually acquire human experience and the necessary knowledge. Those who are involved in Faith and Light must become competent in the way they accompany people who suffer or are in difficulties.”⁵

Called to bear fruit

3. To announce to nations...

That the person with an intellectual disability can become a source of unity and peace

Peace does not come from a position of superiority or power. It comes from this force of life which springs forth from the deepest being, a place where we are most vulnerable, a force of gentleness. The salvation of the world always comes from the presence of God in the weakest.

Our path is a path of humility. We do not try to do great things, but simply to walk with the humblest and littlest people.

We have here the basis of peace for the world, the revelation that the person not only seeks security in the community, but must go further and seek security in the Holy Spirit which is given to him/her. It has taken a long time for humanity to become conscious of the importance of each person. It is really only in 1947 that we had the Declaration of Human Rights where the preamble says this: « The recognition of the inherent dignity of all the members of the human family and their equal rights constitute the foundation of liberty, justice and peace in the world. » The recognition that each person is important, that each person has a value and that each person is a presence of God.³



Respect for life

The quality of a society can be related to the respect and the caring it has for its weakest members. A society does not survive if it eliminates its weakest members and does not consider them. Very soon that society becomes a jungle: the strongest start killing the weakest. As St Paul declares : Those parts of the body that are the least presentable and the weakest are essential to the body. The weakest people are essential to the Church and must be honoured. Society destroys itself if the weakest people are not at the center.⁶



In order to become Messengers of Joy, life has to become music, this type of music composed of little things that blossom in the other in a symphony of colours. What is difficult is to be a silent witness, without brightness, without glory. It is to bring joy to others.

Reflection paths

Being a witness for life

How can we be present in places where there is an issue of dignity and life and witness respect for anyone's life from his/her conception?

Understanding our own culture

Meeting with people from various cultures creates the challenge of understanding our own culture. Faith and Light invites each society to have a new look at the meaning of responsibility and freedom.

Thus, in countries where there is a great distance between those who carry responsibility and others, Faith and Light can demonstrate in a specific way that reciprocity is possible in relationships of equality.

Where individualism determines the relationship between people and groups, specifically in developed countries, Faith and Light suggests that community support allows us to break isolation and to offer presence.

In some cultures, where people learn to hold or hide their opinion, spontaneity in the relationship with persons with an intellectual disability brings freshness, a greater openness in relationships.

Whatever the political system in place in different countries, Faith and Light witnesses that it is possible to grow in mutual trust.

Meeting, the honest examination of situations, prayer are necessary to understand how to achieve a universe of peace.

Let us dream of a world where those who are far away from each other are united in friendship, of a world where no one is isolated or put aside, where those who are helpless are supported, and where those who suffer are comforted. Let us dream of a world where everyone is part of a supportive community.

To make this dream to reality, each one must move forward. The danger is to stay inward looking. If we want to open up to others and to grow, we must set out and walk together, not only as a community, but as a province and also as a big international family. Let us begin our pilgrimage towards the kingdom of God.

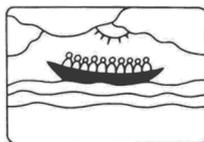
To live is to undertake the adventure to which God is calling us, despite all our weaknesses, to be fruitful one towards the other. Our wisdom is to act with a view to the future: to reach out beyond our communities, beyond the walls that divide this world: religions, disabilities, races, social classes discriminations... To be open and fruitful to others is to believe that, in patience, God is with us.

In this booklet, the numbers at the end of a sentence or a paragraph mean that this paragraph or this sentence has been adapted from an extract of a Faith and Light document:

- 1.Jim Corkery: conference at the General Assembly, Lourdes 2008.
- 2.Jean Vanier, The tears of silence
- 3.Jean Vanier, conference at the General Assembly, Lourdes 2008.
- 4.Booklet “The Ecumenism in Faith and Light”.
- 5.The Charter and Constitution of Faith and Light, 2008.
- 6.Marie-Hélène Mathieu: Une voix pour les sans-voix, KTO, Novembre 2009.
- 7.Documents on the consultation process with the zones on identity and mission of Faith and Light, 2007. Also, see *Pratique de discernement en commun*, Michel Bacq et l'équipe ESDAC, Édition fidélité, 2006.

Several internal documents of Faith and Light were consulted for this reflection. Since we tried to be as faithful as we could to the original inspiration of Faith and Light, it is possible that in writing this booklet some sentences end up being very similar to other texts in use. We want to apologize for not being able to trace back the source of all these sentences or expressions.

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