

Dear all,

On this last day of August 2020, it seems that I can safely tell you that our international fraternities have not been affected by COVID. We hope this pandemic will finally end and allow us to take stock within our fraternities: How did we experience this lockdown? What were the positive and negative aspects of this unique experience? How do we perceive the future?

The International Team of the Lay Fraternity of Charles de Foucauld was supposed to meet in France in the Summer of 2020. In February, Brigitte Leport and I met to organize the arrival of our guests from the other continents. The lockdown put a stop to everything.

Since the last assembly in Lebanon in 2018, we have been communicating via WhatsApp or by email.

This year, thanks to our brother and accompanying priest Jimmy Bonnici, we made use of Zoom while considering the time zones. This gave us the opportunity to see one another and to discuss an agenda that is always full. It is always better this way than by email.

Here are some observations regarding the global pandemic.

**The poor countries** have been even more affected in terms of health (lack of care, protective equipment, etc.), economically (difficulties in finding nutrition, a halt to production, loss of wages, inflation, monetary devaluation, etc.). In the end, some leaders have even stopped dealing with the problem. At the beginning of the crisis, **the rich countries** did not realize the extent of the phenomenon. People were no longer sure what to do because the instructions kept changing constantly. Today, an international economic recession is evolving. We already notice the rising unemployment and poverty is on the increase. Some countries as adopting a certain protectionism: closing borders, then partially reopening them, a period of quarantine required for certain destinations, limitation of imports, etc.

We tend to forget to talk about the migration crisis, terrorism and the problems that were present before the COVID crisis.

Where is hope hiding?

Glimmers of hope rise in the Middle East: in Aleppo, the reconstruction of the cathedral was lived as a rebirth, the rebirth of the Christian people battered by a destructive war.

And now, in Lebanon, the explosion of several tons of ammonium nitrate killed, wounded and deprived thousands of Lebanese of their homes. Faced with this disaster, the population is organizing itself, showing solidarity in a country which was already severely affected economically and socially. All wish to find again a dignified Lebanon, capable of rising from the ruins.

Another glimmer: a new fraternity has just been born in New Zealand.

The future canonization of Charles de Foucauld is also good news to continue building a universal fraternity together with the spiritual family. In this fragile world, let us continue to help our neighbor within the limits of our possibilities. We are not heroes but our duty is to reach out to the most destitute.

All human beings, wherever they may be, deserve to live in dignity: to be nourished, to have a roof over their heads, to have a job, to have access to health care, to an education in a pleasant and respectful environment. Let us dare to build together this better, more virtuous, more fraternal world in the light of the Gospel.

Here is a message of hope from Charles de Foucauld taken from his spiritual notebooks:

"Whatever we do to our neighbour, we do to Jesus. Any spiritual or material good done to our neighbour is done to Jesus: what an apostolic spirit this gives us! "

With fraternal friendship

Laurence Fernandez

Coordinator of the International Team