

# Up Sails!

The international letter of Faith and Light N 57, September 2023



## Called and sent as Peter

International meeting and general assembly, Strasbourg 2023

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# Welcome to Strasbourg!

50 people from 54 countries met in Strasbourg from 4 to 12 July for the international meeting and general assembly held every five years, this year in a very warm and beautiful place: Le Centre Culturel Saint Thomas. 49 of the fifty-one provinces were represented. Unfortunately, nine people were unable to obtain their visas: three from Egypt, one from Kuwait, one from the Central African Republic, one from Rwanda, one from the Democratic Republic of Congo, one from the Dominican Republic and one from Syria.

The theme of the meeting, "Called and sent as Peter", was repeated each day: "Come follow me" (the call), "Master, we are sinking" (fear), "Go out into the deep and cast your nets" (trust), "The least among you is the greatest" (the temptation of power), "You are the Messiah" (profession of faith), "You must wash one another's feet" (service), "He lives and he lived" (witnesses to the resurrection), "Feed my sheep" (mission). Each day, a beautiful watercolour by Silvija Knezekyte, from Lithuania (provincial coordinator of Between the Seas), illustrated the theme of the day.

It was a wonderful meeting, despite Ibtesam's accident and having to be repatriated to Jordan, plane delays, lost suitcases that were soon found... We were delighted to welcome two friends for a few days who came to present L'Arche: John Sargent and Virginie Kieninger, and Pierre Pauchet who came to present the OCH Foundation.

Everything was remarkably well organised by a "sparkling team" made up of members of the Strasbourg community and of other provinces in France, who invited us to a big, beautiful party on the last day. Thank you to everyone for your welcome and your incredible vitality.

The meeting began with the general assembly, at which the 2023-2028 priorities for the movement as a whole were adopted, the board of directors was renewed and Raul Izquierdo and Maria-Silvia de Jesus Tavares were re-elected as international coordinators for a second five-year term.

We experienced everything that Faith and Light communities lived around the world: deepening, celebrations and feasts. In the morning, there were alternating round-table discussions, followed by time for sharing in small groups and various workshops.

One of the nice surprises was a visit from our founder, Marie-Hélène Mathieu. Many thanks to her for joining us!

Back to Strasbourg 2023!





# Opening ceremony



Provinces from Spain and Portugal

**T**his year, we won't be wearing traditional costumes for the opening ceremony, but football shirts! The costumes will be worn on the last day. A group of young people who took part in the Guardamar international meeting in 2017 organised this football presentation evening. They called the international vice-coordinators and after a few ball exchanges, each international vice-coordinator called the delegates from the provinces he or she was accompanying. After a few more ball exchanges, the evening ended in the garden at the "Solidarity Bar" with lots of singing and dancing.



Don Marco whistles the kick-off



Africa and Indian Ocean





Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Switzerland



Middle East



Ukraine



Asia, New Zealand, Australia



Central and South America



France and Belgium



Northern Europe



Northern America



# General assembly

## Reports from the president and the international coordinator



**Hoda Elturk**



**Raúl Izquierdo**

**H**oda and Raúl each presented their reports. Two similar points emerged: the revelations about Jean Vanier's actions were like a bombshell within Faith and Light, and the Covid pandemic affected the whole world. These two events had a profound effect on their mandate. In five years, the Board of Directors has only been able to meet once face-to-face in Trosly (France) and once with the international coordinating team in Salamanca (Spain).

Coordinating teams in these conditions is a real art. Many Zoom meetings were organised, but they were long and tiring. We had to be inventive and creative to maintain links despite the confinements. The provinces, the communities, sent in their accounts of everything they had invented during this period to maintain the links in their community or between the communities in a province. Then came the war in Ukraine. The 37 communities in the country organised themselves to maintain the unity and life of Faith and Light in the country. That's a lot of hardship for one mandate!

Even when the boat rocked, it didn't capsize and the captains didn't leave their posts, even when the temptation was there, they stayed.

Thank you, Hoda and Raúl, for these reports that were more than testimonies, they were almost confidences that gave hope and confidence to everyone.

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## Report from the treasurer



**G**érard Chaurand has completed his second mandate as international treasurer. He reminds us that money is at the service of the mission of Faith and Light and that we are all responsible for the finances. After presenting the accounts, Gérard expressed concern about the declining number of communities and the inequality of contributions between provinces, with donations and subsidies coming only from France. Gérard had three wishes for the future: to continue the annual meetings of treasurers, to play an active role in the future of Faith and Light International and to create an international "donations and legacies" team.

*"At the end of these ten years, I ask you to make your new treasurer happy and smiling for the harmony and development of Faith and Light. Think about it and all act for it!"*

## Priorities 2023-2028

**M**aria-Silvia presented the proposals for the 2023-2028 priorities drawn up after consultation with the provinces. The following proposals were adopted by the General Meeting:

### 1. Develop new ways to promote Faith and Light

- By highlighting Faith and Light's community and spiritual life in a way that responds to the contemporary cultural needs of each country.
- By using all means available (technological, creative, and cultural).
- By reworking Faith and Light documents to be accessible and up to date (except the Charter).

### 2. Encourage the growth of all the members of the movement in shared responsibility at all levels.

- By finding and preparing people to assume leadership roles.
- By providing tools for formation and training.





#### 4. Elaborate a durable strategic, economic, and financial plan

- By conceiving of and putting in practice strategies to find funds at every level.
- By increasing the revenue of the movement by having all the provinces contribute.
- By continuing the work of collaboration between the international and provincial treasurers.

#### 5. Implement the code of conduct in every country

- By adapting it to the laws of every country (ecclesiastical and civil).
- By making sure every member knows the code and is involved in the prevention and the reporting of abuse.
- By promoting the well-being of all members of the community, particularly the most vulnerable.

*Before arriving at this text, the questions and a great deal of attention.*



Claude, Benin



Solange, France

*Sharing these days with the wider Faith and Light family reminded me of the direction in which this movement continues to sail, the need not to forget that we all have a place in our communities, and that they must always be a place of openness for those who want to approach them, because that's how Jesus, our faithful captain, called us to follow him, with qualities and faults. Faith and Light still has a lot of life left in it, and we are called to take care of it.*  
Alejandra, Spain



Final editing

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## Discernment and elections of the new board of directors

**A**fter the vote on the amendments to the Constitution and the priorities for the next five years, the Nominating committee presented the election process and the nominees for the various positions. Led by Elaine Martin (New Zealand), the committee is made up of Hervé Cuche (Belgium), Lucia Casella (Italy), Artkin Muwishi (Zimbabwe, unfortunately absent) and Don Marco Bove.

After a time of discernment, the assembly elected :

- **Antonio Donega Aidar** (Brazil) as president
- **Michat Abbosh** (Lebanon), vice-president
- **Antoine de la Taille** (France), international treasurer
- **Judex Violette** (Mauritius), qualified member
- **Amgad Edward** (Egypt), qualified member

And the meeting re-elected :

- **Raúl Izquierdo** (Spain), International Coordinator
- **Maria-Silvia de Jesus Tavares**, deputy international coordinator



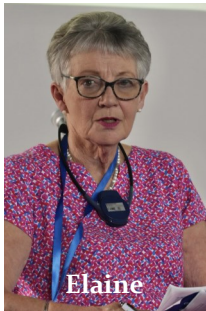
*God gave me the grace to take part in the Strasbourg meeting. The theme of this general assembly was: "Called and sent like Peter". What a privilege it is for me and for each of us to be called and sent by the Lord in the Faith and Light communities to show the glory of God in all our activities in support and care of our children, brothers and sisters with disabilities, friends and parents. It is the testimony of our Faith and the shining of the face of Christ on each one of us. This is the wonderful message that I received, and that each of us had certainly received. In Strasbourg, immersed in a melting pot of Faith and Light communities from all the nations represented, we are called and sent to all nations alongside our brothers and sisters with disabilities. This is the exhortation we have received from this beautiful assembly. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the teams who worked tirelessly and joyfully to make this event a success.*

Claude, Benin



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## The International nomination committee



Elaine



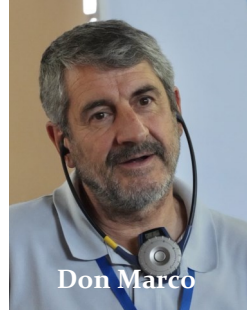
Hervé



Lucia



Artkin



Don Marco



The assembly acclaims the new council





# Conferences and round tables

## "Where do we come from? Where are we going?"

**T**he first teaching of the week is given in a highly original way. Daddy Faith (Raúl) and Mummy Light (Maria-Silvia), who have been married for 52 years, sit side by side and reminisce about their lives. In the old days we had plenty, we had everything. Today we have to deal with a shortage of young people, resources, leaders... We used to be young and beautiful, but now we've grown old. Religion used to be rooted in our culture; today it's indifference or even hostility. In the past, the family model was clear.

We have moved from a paternalistic view of people with disabilities to a more holistic view that takes account of their real needs and abilities. Once isolated, today's families are visible and better integrated into society and the Church. We have moved from a French model to an international dimension.

But we are more essential than ever. Faith and Light is an antidote to loneliness. It gives meaning to life with people with disabilities. It transforms suffering into resurrection, hope and joy.

- *"Darling, I've been thinking about plastic surgery to look better."*
- *"No, don't. I love you the way you are, even if you have grey hair, I love you. Even if you have wrinkles, I love you."*

Faced with this ageing, we might be tempted to be something different so that more people will join us, love us. But we don't. What is essential is Jesus at the heart of our communities and people with intellectual disabilities.



*It was great to hear from representatives of L'Arche and to see friends with disabilities who live at L'Arche in Strasbourg. We were able to meet a father who brought his daughter with disabilities to the meeting for several days, and who lives in L'Arche in Strasbourg. He was really interested in how we live out our faith in Croatia, and it just so happened that he was in my group during the washing of the feet... It's not easy to express the connection that happens during foot washing and prayer. Our hearts are touched in this vulnerability and connection as brothers and sisters of the same Father. This is perhaps the best image of the whole Strasbourg meeting. What will remain is the sincerity with which Raul spoke of the past mandate and the way he dealt with the news of Jean's actions and the difficult period of Covid - a vulnerability that is allowed when we trust in God and in those with whom we share, when there is support.*  
Dijana, Croatia





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## Round table on ecumenism

Christian Albecker, President of the Union des Eglises Protestantes d'Alsace et de Lorraine, Father Jean-Georges Boeglin, diocesan delegate for ecumenism and canon of the Catholic Church, and Christine Durand, member of the Orthodox Church, will be sitting round the table, moderated by Antoine-Marie Izoard, journalist and head of the Ile de France Ouest province. Our three guests are all involved in "grassroots ecumenism" at the heart of their churches. The most important thing is to meet and get to know each other. When we meet and exchange ideas, prejudices fall away. You have to learn from other traditions. You learn to deepen your own faith through contact with others. We recall that ecumenism was born in the trenches of the First World War and in the concentration camps of the Second World War. People were trying to live together in solidarity. Ecumenism means learning about Christ from a Church other than one's own. Ecumenism can only be lived in a faith that loves. The more we allow the smallest person to be himself in the Church, the more we will understand Christ.

At the end, the congregation sang "Father, make us one".





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## The mission of Faith and Light in Churches and societies

Don Marco reminds us that when Faith and Light was founded in the 1970s, it made a major contribution by announcing a new message that promoted the inclusion and participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the life of the Church and society. Today, Faith and Light's mission is still very important, even essential, because it no longer concerns the world of rights, but that of relationships and friendships. It is only the law of the heart and the teachings of Jesus that reveal to us that we are all brothers and sisters, each with his or her own gifts and fragility, with the need to love and be loved. Not only do people with an intellectual disability have the right to be welcomed in their church, but they are also called to be protagonists in the life of the church.

The delegates then split into small groups to reflect on these two questions:

- In the Church to which you belong, what steps have been taken and what closures still exist towards people with disabilities?
- In terms of sacramental life, what steps are still needed to receive the sacraments, to participate actively in the liturgy and in the life of the Christian community?



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## Revitalising our communities

The round table brought together a representative from each continent: Angela Grassi for Europe, Matanda Bakali for Africa, Gracy Tong for Asia, Gabriela Vasquez for South America and Andrew Dean for North America. Faith and Light is present on every continent, with similarities and differences for each country and culture.

The Covid period brought many difficulties. The strongest communities have been organised, the weakest have collapsed, and those that have managed have continued to struggle. How do we look to the future?

After each talk, a key word is chosen: Courage - Communication and inclusion - Unity and invitation - Rejection - Social networks and the media - Young people and witness - Creativity.



Angela, Matanda, Gracy, Gabriela and Andrew



*From the very first day, I felt love, a fraternal atmosphere, a feast of joy, regardless of the different languages and cultures, we are all in the same boat, rowing towards the same place, with storms, with calm, but the most beautiful thing is that we are all united in Christ and for our friends who are the heart of this unique and beautiful movement.*  
Pabla, Chile



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## The coordinator's mission



This teaching was given by Elvira Gomero (Peru) and Urszula Czyrnecka (Poland). The Faith and Light leader serves with joy and humility in a climate of trust, peace and brotherly love. They plan, organise and lead activities. He sets priorities that will support the life of the provinces and communities. His community is his strength. He puts his gifts at the service of the mission. They are united with Jesus and the Gospel message. They recognise their points of growth, overcome their fears and ask for help. They show empathy for the people they accompany and maintain a personal relationship with them. It trains the future leaders who will take on new responsibilities. It engages in dialogue while respecting the ideas of others. It reinforces identity and mission. It sets objectives with the vision of Faith and Light for the next 5 years. It provides support in times of joy and in times of difficulty. To be responsible, you don't have to be wise or perfect, but you do have to be humble and know how to ask for help.

## Presentation of the formation document

Following the General Assembly in Lebanon in July 2018, formation emerged as a priority for the coming term. The board of directors formed a project team to develop a formation plan to propose to the provinces. Joséphine Yamaki (Cyprus), Sophie Alexis (France), Tim and Maria-Cecilia Buckley (USA) and Father Toni (Mexico) met twice a month via Zoom from 2019 to 2021. Sophie and Maria-Silvia presented the booklet produced: "How to give life to our communities", intended for all members of Faith and Light and the various levels of responsibility: community coordinators and coordinating teams, vice-provincial coordinators, provincial coordinators.





# Time for discovery, to meet and share

## Practical workshops and reflection workshops

Each day, practical workshops were offered: making the Faith and Light logo, songs, dances, candle painting... And reflection workshops: the spirituality of Faith and Light, the gift of friendship, the role of the vice-provincial coordinator...



*In Strasbourg, I rediscovered my role as community chaplain and how it helps me to live out my priesthood. Every morning, I return to a prayer by Father Léonce de Grandmaison that begins with these words: "Mary, Mother of God, help me to keep a child's heart..." Meeting Marie-Hélène and hearing her testimony reminded me of this: sharing life with those who have never lost a child's heart also keeps it in us, the so-called 'normals' - even if we are continually tempted to be too adult and too reasonable.*  
Father Jiri, Czech Republic





*Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to be connected to conferences, sharing and prayer during the international meeting. It was a wonderful way to feel connected to international life within Faith and Light. Having shared prayer with the Ukrainian communities since the war, it was a special moment to hear them share at this gathering. Kathleen, Australia*



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## Small sharing groups

Under the leadership of Valerie Jaques (Malaysia), the delegates met each day in groups by language. There were 22 groups in all. One in Arabic, two in Polish, three in Spanish, seven in English and nine in French. Getting to know each other, creating links and reflecting together on the morning's conference and sharing experiences.



### The solidarity bar and the shop

The solidarity bar is open every evening after the vigil. The shop is open during all free periods, where you can buy T-shirts, pens, Faith and Light mugs, etc.

Thanks to the generosity of many friends and the sparkling team, we were able to serve wine, beer, fruit juice and homemade cakes to all the participants in the solidarity bar.

The final takings were 4 600 €.

Many thanks to everyone.



# Vigils of prayer and celebrations

## Ecumenical celebration

After the reading from Luke's Gospel about the calming of the storm and a time of meditation led by Andrew and Emilia Dean Quintana, interspersed with silence and song, all the chaplains present were called to the platform and then laid hands on the whole assembly to bless everyone. After singing "Father, make us one", we recited the Lord's Prayer in our own language.



## Thanksgiving party

After the elections, a thanksgiving party was organised by Marie-France Violette (Mauritius), Endre Czany (Hungary) and Raúl. Three people with disabilities took it in turns to present a treasure chest.





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The first box is opened and contains a piece of paper on which is written: *"Thanks to life"*: thanks for family, children, parents and grandparents, people we have met, friends, work, studies, gifts... Then, in groups of five, we draw on a sheet of paper what we want to thank. With a beautiful Hungarian song, we will all bless and embrace each other.





In the second box, there is a piece of paper on which is written: "Thank you for my community". After the reading of Matthew's Gospel (11:25), "What you have hidden from the wise and learned", each person hangs a photo of their community with a clothes peg on the ropes stretched around the room. This sequence ends with a dance by delegates from Africa and the Indian Ocean.

Finally, the third chest was opened, on the paper it read: "Thank you for the international family of Faith and Light". A small card was given to each delegate, who had to write the word "thank you" on it in his or her own language and decorate it. These cards are then exchanged and taken home.



We were lucky enough to host the international meeting in the beautiful province of France Sparkling East, with over 150 participants from all over the world. It was a magical, enchanting moment. We were thrilled by the diversity of the movement. Discernment for the elections of the coordinator and the members of the board of directors was done with the breath of the Spirit. Each candidate was able to present his or her ideas to the provincial leaders grouped by province. Exchanges and meetings between participants enabled everyone to reflect on the future and to set the direction for the next 5 years. All this was done in a joyful and good-humoured atmosphere, often with music. The morning prayer that led us to follow Saint Peter refocused on our work. The sharing groups gave us the opportunity to better understand the realities of the countries present. The meals were festive and delicious. The solidarity bar welcomed exhausted participants with open arms, but they suddenly regained their dynamism and vigour as they discovered the delicacy of Alsace wines and the bitterness of its beer. Well done to the community of "l'Amour de Dieu" in Strasbourg, who put all their energy (and that of their friends) into organising the event. Many thanks to all those who contributed to the success of this important event for Faith and Light.  
Anne and Daniel Gallien, PC of Sparkling East





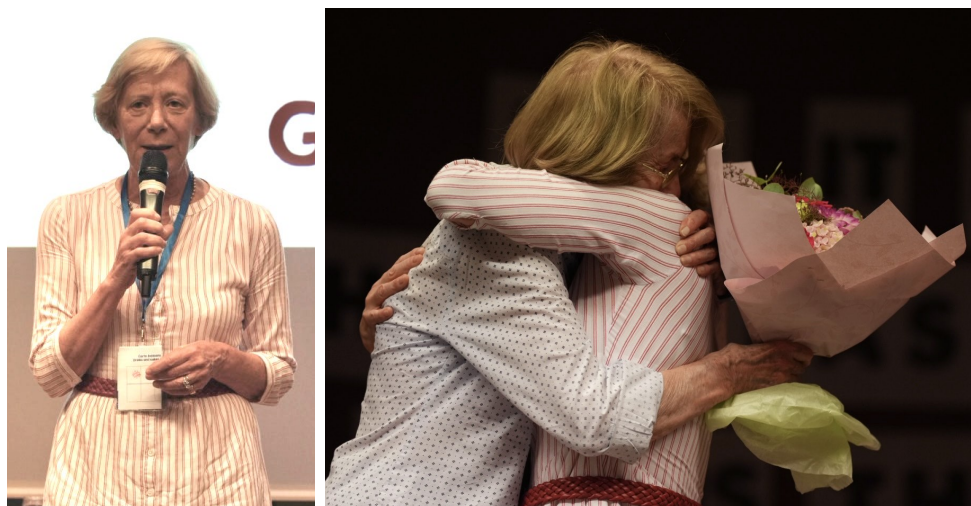
This is followed by thanks to the old and new boards of directors, each of whom receives a service apron.

Then it was the turn of Guénaël Reynaud, who worked in the international secretariat for ten years and who is retiring in 2020 whom we were unable to thank due to the confines. This meeting enabled us to do so by video. Guénaël worked brilliantly on organising meetings and councils, as well as on finances with Gérard. So a thousand thanks again, Guénaël, for everything you've done for us!



Then came the moving farewell to Corinne Chatain, who has served Faith and Light for 23 years as General Secretary. Before becoming a salaried employee, she held almost every position of responsibility: from community leader to zone coordinator! Each delegate presented her with a small gift from their country. Corinne had to borrow a suitcase to bring everything back to Paris... Marie-Hélène's presence and affectionate words added to the emotion. *"I met Corinne in 1976, and she's always been a real firebrand! Before becoming General Secretary, she worked with me on the Ombres et Lumière (Shadows and Light) magazine for seven years..."*

And as always at Faith and Light, the evening ended with song and dance!  
Renewal of our call



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## Renewal of our call



This vigil, organised by Helena Escribano (Spain), begins with a reflection and meditation on responsibility in Faith and Light:

- Responsibility is based on God's love for us. Love is its purpose. Responsibility is the exercise of love.
- Responsibility is a path to perfection.
- Responsibility comes with a choice. God calls us, chooses us, but our response is also a choice, a renunciation, a gift of self.
- The Beatitudes of responsibility: Blessed is the one who serves in prayer, blessed is the one who serves in faith, blessed is the one who serves with humility, blessed is the one who serves with joy, blessed is the one who serves by accepting the cross and hoping for the light, blessed is the one who serves with the Holy Spirit, blessed is the one who serves by committing and giving the best of himself.

During this reading, several people hold up placards bearing the words: prayer, faith, humility, joy, acceptance, hope, Holy Spirit... Each person wears a white towel around their neck, reminiscent of the washing of the feet, as a sign of service. And we





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go out in procession towards the garden. Outside, we are each given a small bamboo boat, a lighted candle and a small heart to hang from our towel. The procession can begin!



### Washing of the feet

Divided into small sharing groups, we wash each other's feet after listening to the Gospel reading from John 1:13-17.





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## Closing ceremony



We've all dressed up in our national costumes for the occasion! It's an explosion of colour and diversity. We are about to be sent on mission by Don Marco and Raúl. It all begins with a reading and mime from the Gospel of Matthew 28:16: *"Go and make disciples of all nations..."*.

Jesus called us to the mountain, and today that mountain is called Strasbourg! Don Marco calls the new council together. Raúl and Maria-Silvia draw a cross on each person's forehead and give them a small sheet of paper on which they can write and sign their agreement to follow Jesus wherever they are sent. In an atmosphere of silence and recollection, each international vice-coordinator gathers his delegates and repeats this gesture in turn. Then he calls Corinne and Céline and the nominating committee... The celebration ends with the Lord's Prayer and a grand farandole.



*The general assembly was an excellent moment: joy, truth, transparency, friendship and discovery. It will remain engraved in my memory.*  
Hervé, Belgium







# Exceptional teams

## The music and song team

A great team led by Raúl with Damijan Mlinaric (Slovenia), Frédéric Cornille (France), Eli Landro (Norway), Peter Gulyas (Hungary), Agnès Simo (Romania), Bruno Magri (France), Matanda Bakali (Zimbabwe), Luis Vieira (Portugal), Cloyd Villegas (Philippines), Hervé Cuche (Belgium) and Joëlle Kielwasser (Belgium). They kept us singing and dancing all week long. Hetty Gommans (Netherlands), who had prepared the songbook with Raúl, was unfortunately unable to join us.

Un immense merci à chacun de vous !





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## The interpreters team

A highly professional and loyal team: Joëlle Kielwasser (Belgium) and Xavier Nys (French), Erika Gonzales and Nancy Salcedo (Spanish), Sebastian Sinski (Polish), Chicca Parmigiani (Italian), Rebecca Ireland and Matesa van Hildebrand (English), Ines Castro (Portuguese), Souleiman Kassouha and Ashraf Zakhary (Arabic) and Joyoung Lee (Korean). A huge thank you to each and every one of you, who played such an important part in making this event such a success!



Joëlle and Xavier,  
accomplices in the  
booths for 20 years



Rebecca



Erika and Nancy



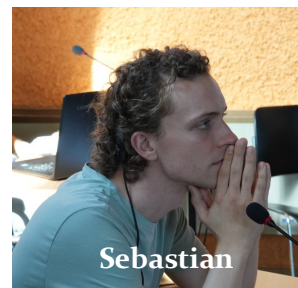
Ines



Matesa



Chicca



Sebastian



Joyoung



Souleiman



Ashraf



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## The Sparkling team

Véronique Thépot, Marie-Odile Frey and Alexia Hillen-Saillard led their Sparkling team with great efficiency, always with a smile! The team behind the scenes, always on the alert to make sure everything went smoothly, organising the welcome and transport from stations and airports, serving at table, responding to each other's needs, preparing the breaks, setting up tables and chairs, preparing the liturgies, organising the magnificent outing to Strasbourg... And Vincent, present everywhere with his camera. All the delegates in Strasbourg thank you from the bottom of their hearts!



Véronique and Marie-Odile



Alexia



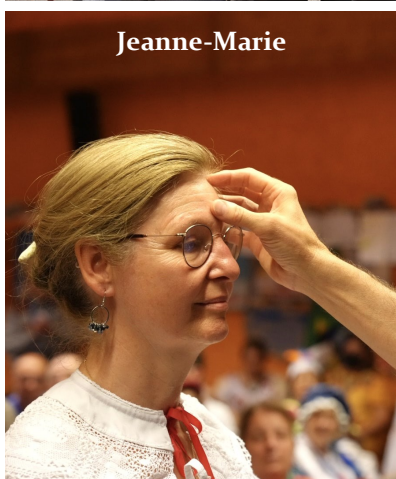
Patrick and Vincent



Jeanne



Renaud



Jeanne-Marie



Anaëlle and Louison



Marc



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## Acknowledgements

Our warmest thanks go to our faithful donor friends, to all the Faith and Light communities who have participated in solidarity with delegates from the poorest countries, and especially to the association Faith and Light France and the Fondation OCH. Finally, we would like to thank all those who prayed for our meeting to be rich and fruitful.



<https://foietlumiere.fr/>



<https://www.och.fr/>

**Many thanks also to our generous sponsors  
for the solidarity bar and the closing ceremony**

- **The Catleya winery** in Romania for bottles of rosé wine
- **Chassenay d'Arce champagne** from Ville-sur-Arce in Aube, France, for bottles of champagne
- **Sautter Pom'or**, creator of fruit juices in Sessenheim, Alsace, for apple juices
- **The Perle brewery in Strasbourg** for the loan of a beer tapping machine
- **The pupils of the Sainte Clotilde school in Strasbourg** for the preparation of sweet and savoury cakes
- **L'Arche in Strasbourg** for 5 people to help with the service
- **L'Arche en Anjou, La Rebellerie** for bottles of rosé wine and grape juice
- **Apedi Alsace** for Kouglöfs
- **Château Puy Servain**, for bottles of Cahors wine.
- **The Château Quattre estate**, for bottles of wine.
- **Marienthal Abbey** for the loan of Alsatian costumes.



# Feed my sheep

