

## **The Constitution of Faith and Light**

*The purpose of the Constitution is to present the objectives of the movement, to define a Faith and Light community and to define the means of coordination at different levels.*

*This Constitution cannot be dissociated from the Charter of Faith and Light, which is its forerunner and defines its spirit.<sup>1</sup>*

*It conforms to the statutory legal requirements of the International Association of Faith and Light.<sup>2</sup>*

### **I. AIMS**

The International Association of Faith and Light has the following objectives:

- 1.** To initiate, around the world, Faith and Light communities that enable the creation of deep links between people with an intellectual disability, their families and friends. These communities meet regularly for friendship, celebration, sharing, reflection and prayer as defined in the Charter, and also for any other initiatives encouraged by the International Council.
- 2.** To create supportive links between these different communities, particularly by means of international meetings and pilgrimages.
- 3.** To provide, at all levels, appropriate formation to various members: persons with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends, and the persons who take up responsibility and/or service in the Faith and Light organization.
- 4.** To organize solidarity between economically richer and poorer zones.
- 5.** To encourage the inclusion of these communities and of their members within the wider human and Christian community with particular attention being paid to the need to respect each particular culture and each particular religious tradition.
- 6.** To collaborate with associations helping people with intellectual disabilities to develop their human and spiritual capacities and seeking to give them their rightful place within society and their own Churches.

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<sup>1</sup> All the rules governing the functioning of the movement cannot be written in the Constitution. For further details, it is necessary to refer to booklets and documents coming from the International Council.

<sup>2</sup> The legal statutes are available from Faith and Light International Association, 3 rue du Laos, 75015 Paris, France.

7. To be a witness to the attitude of Jesus towards people with intellectual disabilities and to recognize them fully as children of God with the capacity for a spiritual life and for true holiness.

## II. THE FAITH AND LIGHT COMMUNITY

### Composition

1. A Faith and Light community is made up of people with an intellectual disability, surrounded by family members and friends (in more or less equal numbers) who meet regularly, at least once a month.

A community may be created from a group of at least ten people who all share the common desire to create a community and adhere to the Charter and the Constitution. Once there are more than fifty members, it becomes necessary to divide the community in order to bring a new community into existence.

### Probationary period

2. A group wishing to become a Faith and Light community receives, from the beginning, visits from either the Regional or National Coordinator (or his/her delegate), when its country of origin is recognized, or from the Continental or Zone Coordinator (or his/her delegate appointed by the International Council) when that country is not recognized yet. The accompanying coordinator (or his/her delegate) will examine with the group if the conditions for launching a new community are correctly met. In due time, he/she will decide on the **beginning of a probationary period for the new community** and will appoint a community leader for a one year mandate, renewable. This leader will bear the name of **correspondent**. The accompanying coordinator will support and advise the new community through regular exchanges by mail, calls, visits, joining in coordinating team meetings . . .

The Community Correspondent is invited, without right to vote, to Regional or National Council meetings.

Whenever possible, the community undergoing a probationary period is twinned with a well-established, older one, in order to help it to acquire a better knowledge of Faith and Light and to live according to its spirit.

### The leader and the coordinating team

3. The community is coordinated by a leader. The leader always is a **layperson**.<sup>3</sup> He/she is assisted by a **coordinating team**. This team is made up of four to eight persons, including at least one parent, one friend, a chaplain<sup>4</sup> and, if possible, a

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<sup>3</sup> At each level of responsibility, the leader (coordinator or correspondent) is a layperson. The coordinator may be elected as a single person, or as husband and wife, in which case, when a vote is taken, they vote as a single person (one vote).

<sup>4</sup> Other expressions may be used, according to the tradition of each denomination, e.g. "priest", "pastor", etc.

person with an intellectual disability. The members of this team are chosen because of their wisdom and discretion. The coordinating team is to be renewed regularly. It meets in order to prepare and evaluate the community meetings, and other community activities. It sets priorities, keeps up the impetus and divides up the responsibilities; its strength lies in its unity.

The Community **Chaplain** is appointed for a three-year mandate, renewable.

#### **Recognition of the community and election of the coordinator**

4. After a probationary period of at least one year, the community may seek recognition, in agreement with its accompanying coordinator. A written request then has to be sent to the Regional or National Council if the community operates in a recognized country, or to the Zone or Continental Council if that country has not received recognition yet. This council is the only body with the capacity to grant **recognition**.

When recognition is granted, the accompanying coordinator prepares and conducts the process of discerning and **electing the Community Coordinator**. This person is elected by the coordinating team after consulting the members of the community. In some cases, the Community Coordinator may be elected directly by the members of the community.

The Community Coordinator is elected for a three-year mandate, twice renewable. He/she becomes a member of the Regional or National Council.

From the time a community is recognized, each of its members becomes an associate member of the international movement, Faith and Light.

#### **Leaving Faith and Light or being asked to leave**

5. A recognized community, which feels that it is no longer its vocation to adhere to the Charter and Constitution of Faith and Light, will leave Faith and Light after having reflected with the Regional and National Councils on the reasons of its decision and the means of its departure.

When, after having been heard and accompanied, a community explicitly or implicitly refuses to keep to the Charter and Constitution, it is no longer a Faith and Light community.

Its departure or removal cannot be carried out without the Zone Council being informed and giving its opinion. The National Council (or the Zone Council) will help the community if the latter wishes to discover and define its new orientation. The community will no longer be called Faith and Light.

### **III. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATION**

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1. In countries where **at least two communities** operate, a National Council is set up. During the probationary period, it is led by the National Correspondent, then, after the country has been recognized, by a National Coordinator. The National Council is made up of the national leader (correspondent or coordinator), the National Chaplain and the community leaders.
2. In countries where a number of communities operate (**a dozen or more**), regions may be set up. The National Council is then made up of the National Coordinator, the National Chaplain and the regional leaders.

### **The region**

3. Ideally each region is made up of four to seven communities. Regions are set up or modified according to need by the National Council after advice from the Zone Coordinator. The leaders from the communities within the region make up the Regional Council.
4. The region is led by a Regional Coordinator elected by the voting members of the Regional Council. He/she is elected for a three-year mandate, twice renewable.

The **Regional Coordinator** supports and confirms the Community Coordinators and Correspondents in their tasks. He/She visits every community and holds regular meetings with the coordinating teams. He/She also coordinates the Regional Council and is a member of the National Council.

5. The **Regional Council** meets at least twice a year. It is mainly a place for sharing, reflection and mutual support. The Regional Council is in charge of coordinating the Faith and Light activities in its region. It is also in charge of organizing the meetings at a regional level.
6. A **Regional Meeting** is to be held, if possible every year, and never less than every other year. This is where and when the Community Coordinators and the coordinating teams have an opportunity for reflection and formation. The National Coordinator is a guest at such meetings. If he/she is unable to attend, he/she may send one delegate.

The Regional Council may also organize celebrations, gatherings, pilgrimages and formation open to the participation of members from all communities.

### **The country**

7. In a recognized country not divided into regions, the **National Coordinator** is elected by the voting members of the National Council.

Whenever a country has been divided into regions, the National Coordinator is elected, either by the Community Coordinators and the National Council, or by the National Council after consulting the community leaders.

The choice for the procedure is made by the National Council with either the Zone Coordinator, if the country is part of a zone, or with the Continental Coordinator. The National Coordinator is elected for a three-year mandate, twice renewable. The National Coordinator is a member of the Zone Council, if the country is part of a zone, of the Continental Assembly and of the General Assembly.

8. A **National Chaplain** is proposed by the National Council and appointed by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority for a period of three years, twice renewable.

The ecumenical situation of a given country may make it difficult to appoint a National Chaplain. The National Council is then to seek an appropriate solution, which will be submitted to the Zone Council for advice, then to the International Council for approval.

9. A **National Treasurer** is appointed by the National Council. His/Her mandate follows the one of the National Coordinator. He/she has the responsibility, under the authority of the National Coordinator, to administer the finances and to help find the funds necessary for the different levels of the Faith and Light organization to operate. He/she participates in the National Council meetings for financial questions, without voting rights.
10. If necessary, one or more **Vice-National Coordinators** may be elected by the National Council for a three-year mandate, twice renewable. They help and support the National Coordinator and act in his/her place if the need arises.
11. The National Coordinator supports and confirms the Regional Coordinators and Correspondents in their responsibilities. He/She visits each region and meets the Regional Councils at least once during his/her mandate. When there are no regions, the National Coordinator supports and confirms the Community Coordinators and Correspondents in their tasks. He/She visits every community and holds regular meetings with the coordinating teams. He/She coordinates the National Council and works for the unity of the movement within the country.
12. The **National Council** meets at least twice a year. This is primarily where and when its members have an opportunity for sharing, reflection and mutual support. The National Council coordinates the Faith and Light activities in the country. It also organizes meetings at the national level.
13. The **National Meeting** takes place at least every other year, or every year, if there are no regions, or Regional Meetings cannot be held. The National Coordinator, assisted by the National Council, prepares and runs the meeting. This is where and when the regional and community leaders have an opportunity for sharing, reflection and formation, in order to acquire deeper understanding of the aims of Faith and Light and the ways in which the movement operates. The National Meeting should also be a time of deepening and renewal during which a true national community is created.

If the country is part of a zone, the Zone, or Continental Coordinator is invited to attend the National Meeting. If unable to do so, he/she may send one delegate.

If the number allows, members of the community coordinating teams may also be invited to the National Meeting.

The National Council may also organize celebrations, gatherings, pilgrimages and formation open to the participation of members from all communities.

### **Admission of a country to a probationary period**

- 14.** In a country where the movement is beginning, and where at least one community is recognized or two communities are in their probationary period, the community coordinating teams may, in agreement with their accompanying coordinator, request **admission of their country to a probationary period**. This request is addressed to the Zone Council, if the country is included in a zone, or to the Continental Council. The country's admission to and continuation in the probationary period are decided upon by the Continental Council with permission from the International Council.

The Zone Coordinator, if the country is part of a zone, or the Continental Coordinator, then appoints a National Correspondent for a one-year mandate, renewable. This correspondent sets up and coordinates the National Council. He/she is invited to the Zone Council in an advisory capacity and to the Zone Meeting, if the country forms part of a zone, and to the Continental Assembly as well as the General Assembly.

### **Recognition of a country**

- 15.** A country may be recognized as a member of Faith and Light under the following conditions:
- ▶ there are at least two recognized Faith and Light communities,
  - ▶ there is a National Council with a chaplain,
  - ▶ the country has been visited by the zone leader, if part of a zone, or the continental leader, who would have met with the coordinating teams and, where possible, with the communities of the country,
  - ▶ the country has participated in a Zone, Continental, or International Meeting,
  - ▶ the country has sent a letter to the Zone Coordinator, if it is part of a zone, or, if not, to the Continental Coordinator requesting recognition, together with a description of Faith and Light in the country,
  - ▶ the country has pledged to contribute financially each year to the life of the movement.

### **Creation of "provinces"**

- 16.** When the number of communities in a country grows to fifty or more, or to more than seven regions, when the distances are too great or for other important

reasons, the National Council can request that the country may be divided into two or more entities (called provinces). The decision is made by the International Council on proposal from the Zone Coordinator, if the country is part of a zone, or from the Continental Coordinator. Every new entity (province) will have the same status a recognized country has.

### **Asking a country to leave Faith and Light**

A country may be asked to leave Faith and Light by the International Council either for a serious reason, or because the country has ceased all communication and participation in the life of the movement for a prolonged period. The decision is taken after coordinators and leaders from that country have been listened to and have been called upon to provide explanations.

## **IV. THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF ZONES AND CONTINENTS**

1. All the countries within a given geographical area belong to an entity called a "continent". The "continents" are the branches of the international Faith and Light family.
2. Within each continent, one or more zones link countries that are close geographically or culturally. Ideally each zone is made up of four to seven countries.
3. The size and composition of continents and zones are periodically revised by the International Council. The Continental Council makes proposals concerning zone reorganization.

### **The zone**

4. A coordinator is elected for each zone for a four-year mandate, twice renewable. The Zone Coordinator is elected by the voting members of the Zone Council, after consultation with its countries.
5. When a new zone (or a sub-zone) is created, the International Council appoints a *correspondent* for a period of at least one year. At the end of this period, the International Council may either renew the mandate of the Zone (or Sub-Zone) Correspondent for a longer period, or it may ask the National Coordinators of the zone to elect a Zone Coordinator.

The Zone Correspondent is invited to the meetings of the Continental Council and to the Continental Assembly, without voting right.

6. The Zone Coordinator supports and confirms the National Coordinators and Correspondents in their responsibilities and works towards the unity of the zone. He/she visits every country (at least once during his/her mandate). He/she is a member of the Continental Council and participates in the General Assembly.
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7. The Zone Coordinators, the Sub-Zone Correspondents and the coordinators and correspondents from the countries within the zone make up a **Zone Council**. They meet every year, if possible.

The meetings of the Zone Council are an opportunity for sharing, mutual support and formation for the coordinators from the various countries.

The National Chaplain of the host country is invited as well as the Continental Coordinator. The council organizes the Zone Meeting, decides on the number of delegates from each country and sets the program of the meeting.

8. A **Zone Meeting** is organized at least every four years. It may take place before or after the International Meeting. It is a time of reflection, when the members of the National Councils and/or delegates of countries in the zone have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the aims of Faith and Light and the ways in which the movement operates. It is also a time of deepening and renewal where a true international community is created.

The National Chaplain of the host country is invited, as well as the Continental Coordinator.

9. A **Zone Treasurer** is appointed by the Zone Council. His/her mandate follows the one of the Zone Coordinator. He/she has the responsibility, under the authority of the Zone Coordinator, to administer the finances and to find the funds necessary for the life of the zone. He/she participates in the council meetings for financial questions, without voting right. He/she works in close contact with the Zone Coordinator and through him/her with the International Finance Committee.

### **The continent**

10. For each continent, a **Continental Coordinator** is elected for a four-year mandate, twice renewable.

He/she is elected by the voting members of the Continental Assembly, from a list of names supplied by the zones and countries within the continent. The whole discernment process is led by the International Coordinator or his/her delegate.

If the continent is not made up of at least two zones, or if the life of the movement in the sense intended by the International Council is either not possible or non-existent, the Continental Coordinator is elected by the International Council from a list of names supplied by the zones and the countries within the continent.

Whenever necessary, the Continental Council may appoint a **Continental Treasurer**, who works in close contact with the International Treasurer. The council may also elect a **Vice-Continental Coordinator**, (who will not be a member of the International Council). Elected members of the Continental Council have voting right.

Election of the Continental Coordinator is ratified at the next International Meeting.

11. The Continental Coordinator supports, accompanies and confirms in their responsibilities the Zone Coordinators and Correspondents and the leaders of a country which are not part of a zone, but are part of the continent. The Continental Coordinator is a member of the International Council.
12. The Members of the **Continental Council** are: the Continental Coordinator, the Vice-Continental Coordinator, if there is one, the Zone Coordinators and Correspondents and the Sub-Zone Correspondents. The Continental Council meets every year, if possible. These meetings are opportunities for sharing and mutual support among the various leaders.  
The Continental Council seeks, following the signs from Providence, to help create communities in countries where there are none as yet.
13. The Continental Council and the coordinators and correspondents of the countries within the continent make up the **Continental Assembly**. They meet every other year, if possible, and if not, at least every fourth year, at the time of the International Meeting. Its elected members have voting right.

The Continental Assembly is to be a place for sharing and formation among all the leaders present so as to seek together how to give a better service to persons with an intellectual disability and the Faith and Light communities in the continent, in the spirit of the Charter. The Assembly also aims at being widely open to the international dimension of the movement and is attentive to the needs and calls from the different zones and countries. The National Chaplain of the host country is invited to the meeting, as well as the International Coordinator or his/her delegate.

14. In between meetings of the Continental Assembly, the Continental Council fulfills its mandate from the Assembly to answer the needs for formation and other requests.

The council may suggest particular projects involving the continent, one or more zones, or certain leaders to meet specific aims.

The council organizes such projects, directly or by delegation to a team. It decides on the requirements, number of the participants, and the program for a given project.

## V. THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL

1. The **International Council** is made up of the International Coordinator, one or more Vice-International Coordinators, the Continental Coordinators and the International Chaplain with Jean Vanier and Marie-Hélène Mathieu in their role as founders: all the above have voting rights.

2. The International Council meets at least twice a year.
3. The role of the International Council is to be a place of sharing between the different coordinators in order to seek together the will of God for the movement and to be of service to people with intellectual disabilities and Faith and Light communities within the spirit of the Charter. The council is attentive to the needs of different countries in order to respond to them to the best of its ability.
4. It must remain linked to the official channels of the different Churches in order to keep them informed of the activities of Faith and Light and to receive guidance from them.
5. It determines to which zone and continent countries will be attached. It creates new zones and new continents according to needs and according to the development of Faith and Light in the world. It appoints the correspondents of new zones.
6. The International Council can set up committees to look at particular questions or to undertake specific projects. The members of such committees and their coordinators are appointed by the International Council for a three-year period, once renewable.
7. The International Council edits and publishes all documents and booklets deemed necessary for the proper functioning of the movement.
8. The **International Coordinator** is elected by the General Assembly by secret ballot for a term of four years, twice renewable.
9. The International Coordinator runs the meetings of the Management Committee and of the International Council and ensures that decisions of the Council are implemented.
10. He/she is the person ultimately responsible for Faith and Light and must be concerned that Faith and Light grows and deepens according to the will of God and for the good of people with intellectual disabilities who are at the heart of the movement.
11. The **Vice-International-Coordinator(s)** are elected by the International Council for a term of four years, twice renewable.
12. The Vice-International-Coordinators help and support the International Coordinator and replace him/her in case of need.
13. The **International Chaplain** is appointed by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority from proposals made by the International Council for a term of four years, twice renewable.

14. A **Treasurer** is appointed by the International Council. His/her mandate follows the one of the International Coordinator. He/she has the responsibility, under the authority of the International Coordinator, to administer the finances and to find necessary funds for the life of the International Association. He/she participates in the meetings of the International Council for the study of the financial questions, without voting right.
15. A **General Secretary** is appointed by the International Council. His/her period of mandate is four years, renewable. The mission of the General Secretary is determined by the International Council. He/She is invited to the meetings of the International Council in an advisory capacity.

## **VI. THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

1. The **Management Committee** is made up of the two founders, Jean Vanier and Marie-Hélène Mathieu, the International Chaplain, the International Coordinator, and the Vice-International Coordinator(s).
2. The Management Committee meets at least twice a year. It invites the General Secretary to its meetings, in an advisory capacity.
3. The Management Committee is mandated by the International Council to undertake the necessary management of the association between meetings of the International Council. It makes a report of its activities at each International Council Meeting.

## **VII. THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

1. An **International Meeting** is organized at least every four years. It is a time of reflection where the delegates have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the aims of Faith and Light and the ways in which the movement operates.

It is also a time of deepening and of renewal where a true international community is created.

2. The International Council decides the program of the meeting, the number of delegates from each country and the number of guests to invite.
3. The **General Assembly** takes place during the International Meeting.

The following participate in the General Assembly with voting rights:

- ▶ the members of the International Council and the Zone Coordinators,
- ▶ the National Coordinators.

The following are present at the General Assembly in an advisory capacity:

- ▶ the Zone Correspondents,
- ▶ the National Correspondents,
- ▶ the National Chaplains,

▶ the General Secretary.

The International Council can also invite guests to take part in the General Assembly, without voting rights.

4. As far as possible decisions are made by consensus after prayer and reflection together.
5. The General Assembly adopts the Constitution by a majority of 75 %. Amendments are proposed by the International Council and agreed to by the same percentage.

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A Constitution was proposed at the General Assembly on 26 October 1980 (Lourdes). It was provisionally adopted for a one year period of study and modification by National Coordinators. The Constitution was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in 1982 (Wetherby, England). Further modifications were adopted by the General Assemblies in 1984 (Rome), 1986 (Santo Domingo), 1990 (Edinburgh), 1994 (Warsaw), 1998 (Quebec) and 2002 (Rome).