



"The new horizons of the Economy of Communion"
International Convention – september 10 -12, 2004

PANEL 1

"THIRTEEN YEARS OF SHARED PROFITS"

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"Thirteen years of shared profits" is the topic that I've been asked to explain in synthesis. There seems to be an analogy that is not casual between this title: *Shared Profits* and *Economy of Communion*.

In the very word "Economy", even though it doesn't exhaust the content, the word *profit* is embedded and in communion the word: *shared*.

During these days together as we examine this new project, we can't forget the root which gave it life and in which it continues to be rooted in order to bear fruit.

In 1991 in Brazil, where as we all know the idea was born, Chiara Lubich expressed it in this way.

"Businesses must be born, companies entrusted to capable and competent elements that are able to run these businesses with maximum efficiency and yield profit..."

Here is what is new: these profits are to be put in common."

Chiara herself, when she launched the *economy of communion* in 1991, enumerated how profits were to be divided: one part for the indigent, one part for the formation of "new persons" for a culture of communion, and one part for the development of the business itself.

After the first months, in 1992, profits began to arrive at the Center of the Movement, fruit of the communion of those businesses that already existed in various continents which wanted to base the activity of their companies according to the spirit of this new Economy of Communion. The Movement's headquarters with Chiara Lubich is located here in Rome, where various competent people work in various sectors.

At the same time throughout the world a delicate and attentive work of "communion" began: to compile and acknowledge the numerous and, at times, unknown forms of poverty



that mutual love was able to bring to light, beginning with those who were already living the spirit of communion in the Movement: families in need of food, faulty roofs to rebuild, urgent medical operations, children to send to school. The needs put in common are limited to those just mentioned not because there aren't others, but to find a common denominator able to provide for the multiple types of poverty that we encounter every day also on the street of the so-called "rich" countries.

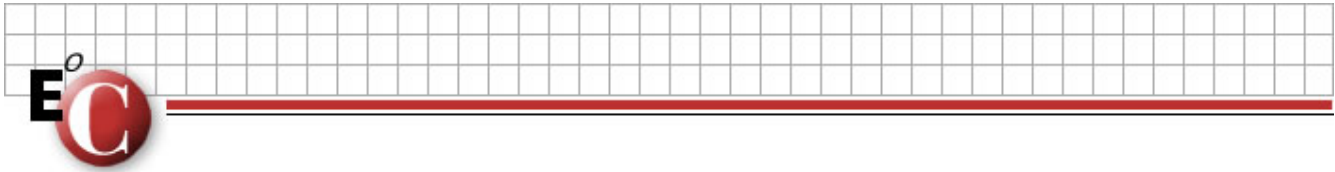
For the part designated to build up a culture of new men and women, a few necessities surfaced that were not able to be met by the normal communion of goods already practiced by the members of the Movement since its beginning in the first community at Trent. These aimed to form "new men" (to use the words of St. Paul) capable of basing their personal and professional life according to that logic which is inspired by communion, a reflection of the Trinity.

Thus we began to sustain and develop structures and courses of formation for persons animated with the desire to be able to act according to the spirit of communion. In addition, this part of the capital was used for the spread of publications which facilitate the knowledge of the project and also the spirituality that sustains it. It was also used to help pay travel costs to reach centers of formation for those who are not able to cover expenses.

We can now quantify in numbers what has just been said synthetically of the businesses that have adhered to this project during these 13 years.

Certainly the statistics aren't able to show the commitment and the passion that has led members of the Movement to take another look at their business and its activity; that has led them to organize it according to those values that lead a company to the point of obtaining profit to put in common for the purposes indicated above.

But the numbers tell even less than what could be garnered from the pioneer and almost miraculous experience of those who began a business or activity, making use of their entrepreneurial capacity, but above all relying on the extraordinary and new culture that arises from the 'communion' rooted in the Gospel: the culture of giving.



(graphic 1) During the first five years there was an evident growing adhesion. In the following years the number has remained relatively stable, increasing slowly. New businesses and activities adhered, while some others closed for various reasons. **(graphic 2)**

(graphic 3) Today there are some 800 companies and businesses that adhere to the project. **(graphic 4)**

Already in 1994, however it was seen that notwithstanding the desire of all the business people to put their profits in common, these were not sufficient to cover, even in part, the requests for the needy and for the structures. The number of the needy to sustain went from 4,444 in 1992 to 11,405 in 2003. **(graphic 5)**

The motives? We can single out a few: the growth of the Movement; the greater sensibility of everyone towards a communion also of one's needs, (kept silent at times because of embarrassment); the world economic situation especially in some parts of the world.

For this reason in 1994 Chiara launched an appeal to all of the members of the Movement: contribute with extraordinary help in order to respond, at least in part, to the requests until the profits of the businesses would be sufficient to cover basic necessities.

The answer was immediate. The extraordinary help, which continues up to today, amounts to more than two-thirds of what is needed. **(graphic 6)**

An example for 2003: the needy to help--excluding those already helped with the communion of good in the various parts of the world--were 11,405. The sum asked-- for food, schooling, medical assistance and housing-- amounted to !,745,715.00.

With the \$305,567.00 that came from the business' profits added to the extraordinary help of \$1,288.331.00, about 90% of the requests could be covered. **(graphic 7)**

This sum was distributed in the nations of eastern Europe, in Asia, Africa, South America and the islands of Oceania.

Now I'll give a brief account of the distribution of part of the profits designated for structures in the last few years.

In 2000 the profits designated for structures were \$393,471.00 which covered, at least in part, the expenses for a carpenter shop in Brazil, a youth center in Peru, a translating



center in Croatia, the repair of formation centers after a tornado in Argentina and an earthquake in Mexico.

In 2001 the sum was \$334.750.00. One part covered travel for formation in Siberia, Thailand, Chile and Burundi; and support for publications in Chinese at Hong Kong and in Urdu in Pakistan; besides other destinations that would be too long to list.

In 2002 \$466.261.00 was used for translations for formation material in Algeria, in Japan for the printing of books, in Slovakia, San Domingo and Uruguay for the restructuring of formation Centers.

In 2003 305,567.00 Euro covered, among other necessities in various parts of the world, the costs of travel and formation material in Congo, Lithuania, Mexico and Singapore;; for the construction and restructuring of Centers of formation in the Ivory Coast, Poland, Belem in Brazil and Venezuela. **(graphic 8)**

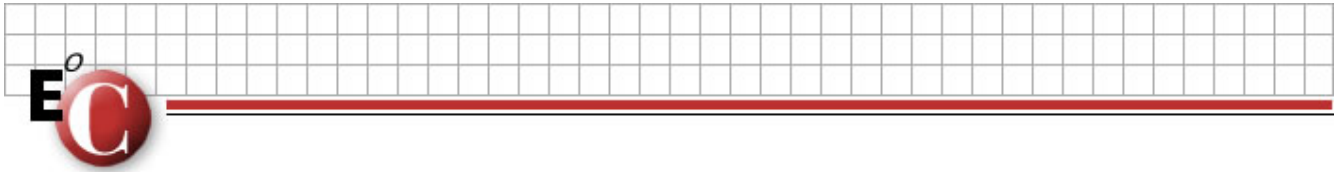
If we want to appreciate in depth the newness of the Economy of Communion in all its particulars, it would be sufficient to ponder a few expressions of those who receive help not as almsgiving from above but truly as love that circulates and that is the fruit of a real communion.

"I want to share the joy of discovering how important is the sum I receive regularly: This helps me not only to cover the expenses for light and medicine, but it is a gift of immeasurable value because it is the fruit of sharing goods and needs." (Brazil)

"My husband has found work and with joy we can now leave the money we received for others who need it more." (Argentina)

"I have cancer and with the help I receive, I am able to take the necessary cures. I pray and offer everything so that the Economy of Sharing develops. I thank God for this explosion of grace that is the Economy of Sharing. I don't know what would have become of me without this precious providence." (Brazil)

"I too am one of the 12,000 indigent that receives extraordinary financial help which let me finish my studies and to know the life of a business that takes part in the Economy of Sharing. Since that time many things have changed in my life. Before I had a deep hatred for rich people because I thought that they did not take care of the poor and thought only of



themselves. Now I understand that love lived also in a business changes everything."
(Philippines)

We could continue with hundreds of letters that testify not only to the gratitude of the persons helped but to a true revolution in economy. Those who give and those who receive are equal actors in the same extraordinary project spread throughout the world, as we will ascertain during the next few days of our meeting.