

## CHRISTIANS LIVING IN COMMUNION AND FELLOWSHIP

**Purpose:** The spirituality that emerged from Chiara Lubich's charism of unity contributes to fulfilling Jesus' prayer, "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). By focusing on the life of the New Commandment (cf. Jn 13:34), Jesus' promise "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" can be achieved among Christians of different churches. It is this presence that breaks down walls of prejudices and creates new spaces for dialogue.

In Austria in 1997, Chiara Lubich said, "Every church throughout the centuries has been, in a certain way, immobilized and drowned by indifference, misunderstanding and even reciprocal hatred. What is needed, therefore, is for everyone to have a supplement of love - or even more, what's needed is for Christianity to be invaded by a torrent of love."

Christians of various churches, in living this spirituality and sharing their experiences as a gift to others, discover the great heritage they have in common, and value the sources of spiritual life within each Church. Chiara Lubich called this a "dialogue of life" that can support other kinds of dialogue and "create a people that is ecumenically prepared."

**History:** In 1955, a Swiss architect, from the Reformed Church, came into contact with the Movement. In 1961 in Darmstadt, Germany, a group of **Evangelical Lutherans** heard Chiara Lubich speak and were struck by her proposal to make life revolve around the Word of God. That same year in Rome, "Centro Uno" (the Ecumenical Centre of the Focolare) was founded, dedicated to unity among Christians - a fraternal meeting place where Christians of various churches could feel welcomed and at "home". Iginio Giordani was the director of the centre up until his death in 1980.

In the same year, groups of German Lutherans began to visit the Movement in Rome. Soon, Christians from the Swiss **Reformed Church** and the **Anglican Communion** also visited Rome. Over time, believers from many other churches coming from many countries began to share the Gospel-based way of life and wished to collaborate with the aims of the Movement: Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals etc. In 1966, Chiara met the Primate of the **Church of England**, the Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey. He and all the subsequent Archbishops of Canterbury have encouraged the Focolare to spread its spirituality in the Anglican Church. In 1967, Chiara Lubich met, for the first time, with some of the directors of the **World Council of Churches** in Geneva, Switzerland. A relationship was established, which continues to this day with various initiatives.

The history of the close relationship between the Focolare Movement and the **Orthodox Church** began when Chiara Lubich met Athenagoras I, Patriarch of Constantinople. Chiara recounted, "On June 13, 1967, he welcomed me as if we had always known each other. 'I've been waiting for you,' he exclaimed, and he asked me to tell him about the Movement's contacts with Lutherans and Anglicans." Chiara met with Patriarch Athenagoras 25 times. This relationship continued with Patriarch Demetrius I and with the current Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I. The Focolare spirituality has also been welcomed by Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, including the Siro-Orthodox, Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian and Assyrian Churches.

**Formation:** Since 1962, there have been **Ecumenical Weeks**, international gatherings of Christians from various Churches and workshops for journeying together, each person remaining within their own Church but witnessing to the unity of the one people of Christ. Since 1981 '**Ecumenical Schools**' and short courses of ecumenical formation have been held in Europe, the Middle East, the Americas and more recently in the rest of the world.

**Bishops from various churches** regularly meet together to deepen their understanding of the charism of unity and to increase their communion in Christ.

**Ecumenical Little Towns:** In 1968, an [ecumenical little town](#) began in Ottmaring, Germany, as desired by the members of both the Focolare Movement and the Evangelical Lutheran community, "The Fraternity of Communitarian Life", which also had as its goal to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity (cf. Jn 17). Now there are other little towns based on this first model, for example "The Centre for Unity", in Welwyn Garden City, north of London, UK and Mariënkroon, near Den Bosch in the Netherlands.

**Ecumenical Networks:** 1999 marked the beginning of the communion among movements and communities of various churches. This collaboration is called "[Together for Europe](#)" and is based on living reciprocal love among all Christians. It promotes the common good, defends life at every stage, supports families and the poor. It works for safeguarding the environment, for peace and for an equitable economy for all.

**New Developments:** [The Patriarch Athenagoras I - Chiara Lubich Ecumenical Chair](#) was inaugurated at Sophia University Institute in 2017, in Loppiano, the little town of the Focolare Movement, near Florence (Italy).

**Contact:**

Centro Uno, for Christian Unity

Via Frascati, 306 – 00040-Rocca di Papa, Rome

Tel.: (+39) 06794798-318 - Fax: (+39) 0694749320

Email: [centrouno@focolare.org](mailto:centrouno@focolare.org)