

Press Release – October 6, 2017

## **Parish Movement, 50 years of history and passion for the Church**

*Celebrated at Vallo Torinese, Italy, on October 8, 2017.*

*«I have been unjustly accused before all members of the Parish Council. I did not utter a word; I cried. After three days I received a telephone call: "Please, can you forgive me?" "I have already forgiven you!", I answered. But then I thought: it is not enough to forgive; I need to go a step further. I can invite this person to dinner and build a friendship that will last forever".* Berenice, a mother of three children, a catechist and minister of the Word related this to the five communities at the Immaculate Conception Parish Church situated on the outskirts of Sao Paolo, Brazil.

As for thousands of committed members of the Parish Movement all over the world, even the experience shared by Berenice, recalls the words John Paul II said during the first international Congress organized by this branch of the Focolare Movement: *"Our communities are called to be an anticipation of the civilization of love. This means that while modelling themselves on the first Christian communities, they need to build social structures that mark brotherhood, relationships imbued with a spirit of peace and reciprocity, solidarity that strengthens the social body and a community life that unifies one's love of God to one's love of neighbour. (...) May you be the cement that consolidates unity among all members, groups, movements and associations that are present in your communities!" ( May 3, 1986)*

It was in July 1966, during an audience with Pope Paul VI, when some parish priests, who came into contact with the Focolare spirituality, were encouraged to spread its spirit of unity among their parish communities. The following year, Chiara Lubich invited these parish priests and their parishioners to a meeting at the Mariapoli Centre, at Rocca di Papa, Rome. The experience lived during this meeting filled the many who participated with great enthusiasm. Thus the Parish Movement was founded, and soon it spread to parishes all over the world.

The 50th anniversary of this foundation will be celebrated on October 8, 2017 at Vallo Torinese, one of the first parishes to welcome this spirit. Youths and adults will animate this open day event, entitled *"50 years of history and passion for the Church"*.

Cardinal João Bráz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and Mons. Giuseppe Petrocchi, Archbishop of Aquila are expected to participate and share their witness about this history. *"From the peripheries of the world to the Vatican"* will be Cardinal's theme while the Archbishop will speak on *"The Parish Movement's vocation in the light of Iuvenescit Ecclesia"*. The venue for this event will be the Maria Orsola Centre, named after the sixteen year old member of the Movement at Valle Torinese, who died suddenly in 1970. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints has recently declared Maria Orsola to be Venerable.

The Focolare members involved in parish work seek *"to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church"* (EG, 29). They feel called to contribute towards making their parish a

home and school of communion. They work together and thus sustain a stronger bond of unity among the members of the Parish community; this generates service and care especially for those in need. They also support initiatives aimed at collaboration, where members of different Churches and ecclesial communities, members of other religions and also persons who have no particular religious conviction are involved.

The specific consonance between the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the principles that animate the Parish Movement sustained the setting up of the *Evangelii Gaudium Centre* at the Sophia University Institute in Loppiano. This centre is meant to contribute towards going deeper into the thought of Pope Francis and its application, even through academic courses in pastoral care.

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