



## Making the world new

*"How can we always have the Holy Spirit with us?" This is the question that some young people asked Chiara Lubich in 1989. Here is her answer:*

[...] The Holy Spirit is present when we love. He has poured love into our hearts; this is what he has given us - love. If you put love into action, he will always be present. If you stop and get stuck, then he won't speak any longer. On the contrary, something negative might filter into your soul, something that is not only wrong, but that comes from another "spirit," from the "prince of this world" as Jesus says; the devil might come and tempt you. Instead, if you keep on loving, you will always be in the light and under the influence of the Holy Spirit. So, to be in this atmosphere always, you have to keep loving, always.

Of course, you will say, "But Chiara, that's not so easy!" Certainly, it's all a question of habit; getting into the habit. But then you will have special graces, encouragement from the Holy Spirit, divine gifts in your soul that help you go ahead and keep going. You will experience these in your life.

So, love! Love always! Then you can be sure that if you love one another, Jesus will be in your midst and the Holy Spirit will be in your midst. You all know the technique of our love, of Christian love, which is based on four points. Just one would be enough to make us saints.

Be the first to love, always outwards, making the effort to love, in action, always dynamic... because the life of the Trinity is one of dynamic love. We have to imitate the life of the Trinity in which love doesn't stand still, it's dynamic. So be the first to love! Love everyone, it's a fantastic opportunity

*Dear readers,*

*Two months have passed since the new version of [focolare.org](http://focolare.org) went online and the first edition of the Mariapolis newsletter in PDF format is now available.*

*Each issue will contain the most important news of the last two months. The layout has been designed to enable you to print either all or part of it on A4 paper. This means we can share the news with those don't have easy access to the digital world. Thank you for the feedback, suggestions, criticisms and ideas about the new version of the site. We were glad to see the level of interest in our new editorial approach, moving away from mainly covering internal Focolare Movement news to attempting to find answers to the questions put before us by today's world. We are doing this by changing both our use of language and the choice of topics we cover, as well as the way we present them.*

*Thank you for your interest and support,*

*Joachim Schwind  
Focolare Communications Office*

to have the Holy Spirit, because you meet so many people during the day and you have to love them all. You can't say, "I'll love this one but not that one." No. See Jesus in all of them and this simplifies everything. Then love others as ourselves, the same as ourselves, in the exact same way. ...

Being the first to love, loving everyone, seeing Jesus. If we only did these four things, it would be enough to live the whole Ideal, to have the Holy Spirit, and conquer the world. That would be enough. ...

As time passes it will happen more and more. Every move, every smile, every step, all you do will be the effect of the Holy Spirit in you. So, take courage! Let's go ahead along this path and we'll fill the world with the Holy Spirit, who makes all things new and renews the world. ■

# Note from the Focolarini

27 Novembre 2018

*The wave of violence in Southwest Cameroon shows no sign of stopping. The focolarini have had to flee the little city, although they remain in the country.*

“How long can we hold out? What will happen next? Will we be able to still live in Fontem? We’ve kept going, even in the most adverse conditions.”

With these words the focolarini of Cameroon’s little city shared their difficult decision on November 16 to not go back to Fontem – although they still remain in the country. There are just not the “fundamental conditions to be able to continue living there.”

“Many things have happened,” their message continues, “especially some serious incidents that made us reflect on the choices to make... It was with a heavy heart that we decided not to go back to Fontem for the moment, in order to rebuild our strength and try to understand what God wants.”

The wave of violence in Southwest Cameroon, which is where Fontem is located, unfortunately shows no sign of stopping. In the last few months, even the bishops of Cameroon have tried to get their voices heard, raising “a cry of anguish” at the deteriorating security conditions in the English-speaking regions and calling for political mediation to avoid “useless civil wars.”



The Focolare’s little city is located right at the access point of the armed conflict. It has had to close down its education complex for some time now, although the hospital continues to work and give aid to those in need.

## Fontem’s present and future

7 January 2019

*For months we’ve been following apprehensively as the situation evolves at Fontem, the first of the Focolare’s little towns in Africa. We were able to reach Margaret Long and Etienne Kenfack, who speak for the community there and let us know the latest.*



“For Fontem, 2018 was a difficult year,” explains Margaret Long, “because the conflict that is still ongoing in the northwest and southwest regions of the country shows no signs of calming. Many residents have been forced to leave their houses and take shelter in the forest or in nearby cities. The college has been closed for some time, and the hospital is running on a skeleton staff.”

“Ever since we focolarini left Fontem last October – a difficult decision, but taken together, we were certain it was the right thing to do – many others left as well, especially families who wanted to give their

Fontem, “Mary Health of Africa” hospital



2002, Chiara Lubich on a visit to Fontem

children the chance to go to school, which was no longer possible in the little town.

“Unfortunately we can’t say when life will be able to get back to the way it was. We are in daily contact with those who have stayed: Aracelis Nkeza and Mbe Tasing Charles are carrying on the life of the Focolare community there.

“As far as the hospital is concerned,” continues Etienne Kenfack, “the current level of danger does not allow us to guarantee the security and protection of those who work there. We therefore turned to the health authorities to try to understand how to proceed.

“Based on their advice, we communicated the situation with employees and concluded our working relationship according to the legal norms there in Cameroon. Those who chose to continue working did so freely under their own personal responsibility. This is why the hospital continues to maintain a minimal level of service for the population.”

To the question of what the future holds for the little town, Margaret responds that everyone greatly hopes that people can begin again and life can return to normal.

“The closeness of many people around the world who are praying or write to us gives us a lot of strength.” Doubts may arise as to whether the conflict, other than destroying human lives, material goods and even dreams, is compromising Fontem’s mission as Chiara

Lubich saw it — to be a beacon of unity and intercultural dialogue for the African continent.

Etienne explains that since the early 1960s Chiara compared the little town to a light that originated from the reciprocal love lived by everyone. “Today, 50 years later, it seems that this love and solidarity between everyone has grown. You could even say that the more precarious and dangerous the situation becomes, the more it increases.”

Margaret adds that many things have changed in Africa since the beginnings. “In those days the spirituality of unity had only reached Fontem, while today it is in every country on the continent. There is the little town in Man (Mariapolis Vittoria) on the Ivory Coast, which gives witness to intercultural dialogue, and there is also Mariapolis Piero in Kenya, which is a training center for all of Africa in the spirituality of unity. In addition, many focolarini who were at Fontem have now gone to support other focolares on the continent.

“Despite continual challenges, the uncertainties of each day, and not knowing how it will all end, we are sure that God’s plan for Fontem has not been interrupted. As Pope Francis says, we are only at the beginning, and the Holy Spirit, who renews all things, will surely also remake Fontem”. ■

*Stefania Tanesini*



## Christian lawyers in London

*Lawyers and legal students from different Christian churches meet to encourage each other to live out the Gospel in their professional life.*

“The gospel has profound implications for the legal world. The Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship exists to bring the whole Good News of Jesus Christ within the legal world” (LCF website). Founded in 1852, the LCF unites Christian lawyers from all around Britain, as well as forging international links among legal professionals. It promotes three main areas of action: to live according to the “law of the Gospel” in one’s daily life; to form young legal professionals; to be active on an international level.

As part of this third aspect, the LCF held a conference in November entitled: “A lawyer after God’s own heart: Lessons from Psalm 119”, inviting representatives of the “Communion and Law” international network of legal professionals and students animated by the Focolare spirituality. Elisabetta Scomazzon and Pasquale De Rosa, consultants in the field of canon law, attended for “Communion and Law”.

### **What was the main focus of this meeting of lawyers from different Christian Churches?**

*Elisabetta Scomazzon* – Faith was at the centre: the bond which links us together most strongly, even more than the legal profession itself. Meetings like this are particularly significant because starting from being united on a personal level, we move on to find ways ahead in the legal field, for example through a clear uncompromising commitment to defend the weakest in our societies. Through choices like this, those of us active in the legal system can contribute towards building relationships that are more constructive and “fraternal”.

### **During the conference, what points in common and what areas for future development in the legal field did you cover?**

*Pasquale De Rosa* – We have in common, above all, the shared commitment to witness to our Christian life in our profession. For example in the lawyer-client relationship and in the various environments a Christian lawyer works: to be authentic witnesses to the “good news” which every Christian carries within. Our work proceeds alongside that of our own Churches. What we have to do, is to collaborate together, starting from what Chiara Lubich called the “dialogue of life”, putting in common our experiences as legal professionals. For example, a pressing concern is that of human rights and how they are under threat in the current world situation.

### **How can Christian lawyers and legal professionals contribute to peace and harmony within their own societies, in today’s climate characterized by divisive ideas and praxis?**

*Elisabetta Scomazzon* – Every nation and people has its own order and rules. The Law can actually be an instrument of communion which helps to find solutions to the urgent demands of our planet and to the cry of humanity subjected to injustice, exploitation and war. Christians of different churches finding solutions in the legal field does not need to be an utopian idea, but could be a great opportunity to give hope that unity is possible. ■

*By Editor*

# Belgium: it's the time of the 'we'

*The Focolare contributes in the complex path of integration and dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Belgium, a land that was also wounded in the 2016 terrorist attacks.*

“The time of the ‘we’ has arrived”, “we are a community, a ‘prophetic minority’”. This was what Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement, and Jesús Moràn, its Co-President, have expressed during their meeting in Brussels. An appointment that convened Christians and Muslims in the said country, who for years have been trying to live fraternity in diversity, as well as the respect for each one’s cultural and religious identity.

Present were about 50 persons, half of whom were Muslims and the other half Christians, but all actors of dialogue. It has begun with festive greetings over a cup of Moroccan tea, creating a family atmosphere. “We experienced profound unity—said Jesús Moràn—because God is so great and is present everywhere in our life.”

The story of Islam in Belgian started fifty five years ago with the arrival of immigrants from Morocco and Turkey, followed later by those from other countries. Today, it is enriched by the new generations born in Belgium. After the Brussels attack on March 2016, dialogue with Muslims has become a political priority. There is a new awareness about the problems related to integration, or rather, of the non-integration of a minority of Muslims. Oftentimes, the accent is placed on diversity, on the “we” and the “you” that is fostered by the fundamentalist current. In the said country are living a minority of believing and practicing Muslims, who manifest their identity even in public spaces, and a majority of citizens who refuse their Christian heritage, most of whom are agnostics or are indifferent to the faith. This materialistic and strongly secular society often confuse fundamentalism with the essence and beauty of Islam.

The friendship between the Focolare and the Muslims in Belgium started years ago when a focolarina came to teach in a predominantly Islamic district. A profound rapport was born with many of the inhab-

itants. Bit by bit, some of them wanted to know the inspiration behind this generous teacher’s life. Thus, a nucleus of persons desiring to walk along with the Focolare was born, and they also participated in the international meetings of interreligious character. The dialogue that begun is, and remains to be, a “dialogue of life”, weaving a network of fraternity that is lived, renewed, and appreciated, especially in this difficult time of widespread fear. ■

*Chris Hoffmann*



# An extraordinary day

*An occasion to recall the story of Alberta Levin Temin, speak about the Shoah with secondary school students and propose that the Golden Rule is a way of creating a more united and peaceful world.*

Splendid sunshine provided a background to a special day in Ischia, an island in the Bay of Naples in Italy, when on January 23, a group of students from Giovanni Scotti High School attended the presentation of a book entitled “I Will Speak for as Long as I Live”. At this event, they learnt about Alberta Levi Temin who was a direct witness to the tragedy of the Holocaust and an admirer of Chiara Lubich. The young people listened to an emotional account of her life story in the presence of a group of friends of the Focolare Movement including teachers, students, parents and even the author of the book Pasquale Lubrano Lavadera and Diana Pezza Borrelli. The latter had met Alberta through the “Association of Jewish-Christian Friends” in Naples and had enjoyed a warm relationship with her.

Pasquale said, “One day, Alberta came to speak in my school. She was Jewish but she came with her dear friend, Diana, who was Catholic. She had been invited to speak to staff and students about the horrors of the Shoah but also to witness to the fact that dialogue is possible among people of different races, faiths and beliefs. I was very struck by one thing she said, “There is only one human family and we are all brothers and sisters.””

Alberta died in 2016 but throughout her life, she was sustained by one idea. It was the Golden Rule “Do to others what you would like done to you and do not do to others what you would not want done to you.” This idea always filled her with joy. She was committed to creating dialogue at all levels of society. She said, “I understand that today, more than ever, we need to love: as Chiara Lubich



says, ‘We need to love another person’s country as much as we love our own.’ We should love the whole of humanity: it is only in this context that dialogue can develop.”

“Every school should dedicate an hour or two each week to teaching all classes about the value of relationship. This helps young people to live together in a peaceful way and to collaborate in their studies for the good of all. Their school years are their first experience of being part of society and they should aim at making this a time of mutual support.” Alberta was convinced of this.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the young people were invited to live the Golden Rule – “do to other whatever you would like done to you” – an instrument of peace and dialogue shared by all religions. To mark the occasion, the director of education, Lucia Monti, put a plaque by the olive tree dedicated to Alberta to express gratitude towards her and to encourage people to remember her example.

Chiara, a student from the school, also said, “Thank you for the message of fraternity that you have given us. I am so impressed by the fact that Catholics are meeting with Jews and people of other religions to contribute to building a united world.”

Pasquale Lubrano said, “I feel that I should thank Alberta for her life and wisdom. Now that she is no longer among us, I hope that by reading her story, each person here can experience her unique interior “beauty” and share this with others.” He concluded by saying, “Today I have been deeply moved by the attentive way in which the young people have listened, by their enthusiasm and by their searching gaze. In each one of them I have seen the need to live Love for all human beings and the awareness that the human family is one.” ■

*Lorenzo Russo*





### 5 And your strengths?

*Optimism and trust. I trust in God and in others, even if I don't know them, even if I realize that my trust is misplaced. This makes it easy to relate to others.*

## Nine questions to Maria Voce

*From an interview with Focolare President Maria Voce, originally published in the January issue of Neue Stadt magazine*

### 1 What makes you laugh?

*Bloopers. For example I'm walking, I don't see a step and find myself on the ground. I laugh so hard inside it's difficult to get up!*

### 2 What gets you mad?

*I don't feel anger grow inside me. At the most I feel sorry – for something that's happened, that's been said to me or annoyed me.*

### 3 What's been the most important experience of your life?

*When I met a group of young people whose unity and witness fascinated me. They were consistent with the Christianity they lived, loving and being at the service of everyone, without ever judging anyone. This led to me getting to know the Focolare. My life changed the moment I truly listened to someone, thinking that he was my brother, that Jesus was within him.*

### 4 What are your weaknesses?

*Curiosity. When I hear two people talking outside my door I can't help but bend an ear. Each time I have to take a step and set that aside.*

### 6 Where is your favorite place?

*I like the whole world. But in terms of a favorite place, I think of a comfortable house, where there are people with whom I can have true, deep communion. If possible, it would be a warm place with sun – on the shore! In my mind this house would be in a city, since I am a pretty social person.*

### 7 What helps you rebuild your strength?

*A good sleep after having lived the present moment well and entrusted my worries to the Eternal Father.*

### 8 What worries you?

*Everything that has to do with conflict and hostility: wars, family quarrels, unresolved problems. Many times there is nothing I can do about it, but if I can, I try to find a solution or help others find one.*

### 9 What do you have at heart as you guide the Focolare Movement?

*For the movement to be an authentic witness of the charism of unity. There are groups all over the world who are living it this very moment. This gives me peace, it gives me confidence. This is where new ideas are born – new ways of incarnating. May they bring the charism of unity forward so that it achieves the goal Jesus prayed for: "That they may all be one."*

# U.S.-Mexico border/1: Welcoming migrants and giving hope

*Despite the media spotlights turning on and off on the drama that continues at the border between Mexico and the U.S., there are many people and organizations, including Focolare, who have not abandoned the migrants there.*



In past weeks, news and images of thousands of people marching from Honduras toward the U.S. border have gone around the world.

“In this region, the phenomenon of migrants is really common,” explains Sandra Garcia-Farias Herrera of the Focolare community in Northwest Mexico. “Mexicali and Tijuana are border cities, having grown because of the high number of people who have arrived here dreaming to enter the United States. Yet what we’ve witnessed in the past month is unprecedented.

“The people themselves cannot understand how the phenomenon has reached these proportions, or what would have pushed so many families to leave everything behind, even during rough weather, and get on the road.

“Here is where the road ends, and it seems that their dreams shatter. Streets and public places have become

camp. There is a lot of confusion, and we’ve witnessed violence, the closure of border crossings into the U.S., the installation of razor wire along the wall, and a huge deployment of police forces protecting the borders, with helicopters and armed vehicles never seen before. It feels like war is about to break out.

“The lack of information as to what pushed these people to move, as well as news from mainstream and social media, has caused the residents of Mexico to have mixed feelings, from hostility, resentment, to even episodes of xenophobia.”

While some young people from Focolare are trying to find a way to enter into the migrant camps – for many the final destination of their Mexican journey – others have reached out to migrants in the street, trying to understand what motivates them, and especially their needs.

One family drove two women with small children as far as Tijuana, so they could avoid the extremely arduous route.

Others who work at an education center suggested students change their cultural attitudes to show migrants solidarity and the sense of fraternity that every person deserves.

“The priority now is to oppose the rampant confusion and the intolerant acts that come from it, even among young people. We need to spread a culture of welcoming.” ■

*Chiara Favotti*





## Mexican-USA Border/2: the long trip

*Christopher Jimenez, member of the Focolare Movement community in Mexico, tells about the migrants' long exodus from Honduras, while remaining weeks at the foot of the wall bordering the United States.*

“On 12th October, we received several calls through the social network—affirm Christofer Jimenez, who collaborates with the association Promozione Intergrare della Persona (PIP) —making it viral in a short time. More than thousands of Hondurans left San Pedro Sula”, a city, which until 2014, has been considered for years among the most violent on the planet. From that time on, the whole world has been witnessing what has been defined by many as a biblical exodus.

“A week after the caravan crossed the border of Mexico, numerous civil society organizations and government agencies have already set out to provide humanitarian aid, first at Chiapas, then at Oaxaca and Veracruz.”

At that point, it was no longer a question of a single contingent of migrants, but of different groups that proceeded in waves, on foot or by some lucky means, crossing the country for thousands of kilometres.

“At the end of October - continued Christofer - when their arrival in Mexico City was imminent, an interruption of the drinking water was scheduled for the over four million inhabitants of the capital, due to a serious water problem. Yet, many civil and religious organizations, despite the hardships and intense cold, have responded to the invitation of the local Human Rights Commission, setting up a humanitarian camp to the east of the city.

The Focolare also joined. About thirty people, including doctors, nurses, students, housewives, went to the relief and meal-clothing distribution points. Also, another group organized a collection of basic necessities and a civil association, inspired by the Focolare spirit, offered technical and logistic collaborations.”

On the morning of 5th November, about five thousand migrants arrived in the capital. Almost ten thousand people received hospitality, food, blankets, and clothing in the following days. “Despite the solidarity of many, their passage was not free from friction and violence. Some incidents have been on the verge of causing serious episodes of xenophobia. Now the wave of migrants is

waiting impatiently under the impassable wall that separates the Mexican city of Tijuana from the United States. We are expecting days of great uncertainty. But in their passage, even amid the pitfalls of a very complex path, they have indicated, the direction by which their dream moves, to the heart of the Mexican people.” ■

*Chiara Favotti*



# Changing Islamic-Christian recounts

*The Islamic-Christian Workshops, which took place in the little town of Loppiano and the city of Trento, deny the current narrations of hatred and mistrust between the two religions.*

Trento, 7 December 2018. The Week of Unity, the last step of the prophetic project: Wings of Unity, which was organized by the Focolare Movement: Sophia University Institute (IUS) and the Center for Interreligious Dialogue, in concordance with the Risalat International Institute of Qum (Iran) has ended. The date, place and research group set-up are not casual. In Fact, the date marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of Chiara Lubich's choice to dedicate her life to God, leaving everything to follow him.

The protagonists, majority youth, are composed of about fifty people, Shiite Muslims and Catholics, coming from various countries: Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, United Arab Emirates, USA, England, Canada, Argentina, and Italy.

This initiative took shape about less than three years ago, marking the twenty-year long path of friendship between Prof. Mohammad Shomali, his wife Mahnaz, and the Focolare Movement.

From this friendship, both intellectual and personal, Prof. Shomali of the Risalat International Institute of Qum and Prof. Piero Coda of IUS, had the idea of leading a small group of Muslim and Christian academics from both institutes, to reflect on a crucial theme: unity of God and unity in God. This brought about the understanding of the Islamic sensibility of absolute monotheism that opens up to the Christian perspective of God as dialogue.



There were many voices of reflections, which bring different thoughts and traditions that demonstrate and not impose the Truth, but walk together towards it.

The lectures touched on key points like the world's globalized culture and the fundamental truths proposed by the two faiths, but above all, it made an experience of hearts and minds leading to a real Shekinah, which is the presence of God's peace among the faithful.

This experience did not limit itself to the sole participants, but expanded in two precious moments of sharing. The first was in the International Centre in Incisa Val d' Arno (Loppiano), while the second was in the Mariapolis Chiara Lubich Center in Cadine (Trento).

Those from Loppiano and Trento did not only listen to an experience that seems to dramatically contradict the current accounts regarding the relations between Christians and Muslims, which speak of fear, rejection, and invasion. They were able to make a profound experience of mutual enrichment, in a climate of peace that makes living and building, what Pope Francis calls, a 'culture of encounter' possible. ■

*Roberto Catalano*



# Wallis-Futuna: We are cleaning up our island

*For more than three years, the Focolare community in Wallis-Futuna has been collaborating with the local authorities in an ecological initiative to restore the island of Wallis to its original beauty*

Wallis, Futuna, Alofi and another twenty small islands in the northern Pacific Ocean form an archipelago, which has been part of the French overseas territories since 1961. Wallis is the largest and most densely populated island; it is surrounded by lots of smaller islands and by an enormous coral reef. This area of outstanding natural beauty is being gradually spoilt by the increase of rubbish that is accumulating there. Everything from drinking straws, scrap, plastic bottles to tyres, glass and old furniture is either being dumped on the island or being washed up by the ocean, polluting the beaches and marine life.

Eva Pelletier from the Focolare community said, “The problem has become more serious and has attracted a lot of attention from the media, including coverage by the RFO Wallis and Futuna channel. In 2015, in response to Pope Francis’ encyclical ‘Laudato Si’, we decided to launch a series of initiatives, aimed at both adults and children, to create greater awareness of the problem on our island. This ecological action created opportunities to collaborate and dialogue with a range of local organisations and groups.

The problem has caused division and tension among the three leaders in the area and even in the Governing Assembly. In fact, we were very surprised when, in November 2017, at the beginning of the week dedicated to waste reduction all over Europe (SERR), our Prefect, with the support of the Department of the Environment, wanted to take part in one of our initiatives on the little island of Nukulooa, to the north of Wallis. Given the significance of the occasion, they were joined by other ministers, the leader of the northern district and the governors of Vaitupu and Vailala.

After the opening speeches and ceremony offering garlands and typical food to the participants, a child very spontaneously handed out gloves to wear during rubbish collection; the first people to be given these gloves were the Prefect and the Prime Minister. That day we cleared 500 kilos of rubbish from the beaches.



The Department of the Environment has supported this initiative since 2016 and has provided boats, lorries and workers. In May last year, we realised that we should not limit our work to just the collection of rubbish (more than 2600 kilos) but that we should focus on the prevention of an epidemic of dengue fever that is spread by infected mosquitoes. We began to clean up the canals, drains, riverbanks and even a very deep well. Everyone needs to do their part and even if they do not, we are not going to lose hope. As Chiara Lubich said, ‘In loving, want counts is to love.’ ■

*Chiara Favotti*



## Argentina: We head to the South



*Natives and migrants live side by side in this vast territory characterised by its cold and dry climate. This is Patagonia, in the extreme south of Argentina, where there are various communities of the Movement and where there has been a focolare centre since 2010.*

It's an enchanting landscape with rivers, lakes, the sea, mountains and glaciers. It's populated by many species of animals: whales, penguins, mara (or hares) of Patagonia, guanaco (similar to llamas and common in South America) and Darwin's rhea, a large flightless bird endemic to this region and known locally as the "choique".

In this scenario with its cold and dry climate, the southernmost focolare centre in the world opened in the city of Trelew in 2010. The territory of Trelew, inhabited by the native Mapuche-tehuelche peoples, was named after the arrival of Welsh immigrants in 1865. The city is almost a natural "gateway" to the vast territory of Patagonia (1,768,165 km<sup>2</sup>), which was already home to lively groups of members of the Movement.



Today the focolare accompanies the communities of Neuquen, Rio Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego. There are five focolarinas in the focolare - Angela Correia of Brazil, Emma Murillo of Mexico and three from Argentina: Silvia Deramo, Mónica Reina and Maria Ángel.

"I am very happy to be here where Don Bosco sent Salesian missionaries, after he saw a land that he recognized as Patagonia a dream," explains Mónica.

Emma introduces herself: "For me to meet the Focolare Movement was to experience the immense love of God. The more I knew God, the more I wanted to love him, to follow Him to bring Love to the ends of the earth. And in fact ... that's where I am - right at the end of the world!!

How do we live here? We try to put evangelical love into practice: at work, on the street, in the parish and in the communities of the Movement scattered throughout Patagonia."

Angela, a professor of Portuguese language at the state university, continues. "I have experienced that trying to convey the values in which I believe, not through words, but through the way I live, has created relationships of friendship and trust with colleagues and students. I have seen many individualistic attitudes change."

Assisting the local Church in pastoral activities, engaging in the dialogue between the Churches and with people of other convictions, as well as assisting in activities to support needy families are among the activities of the Movement in this culturally rich environment and very varied society.

The population is made up of people from different countries and cultures. Many move from neighbouring regions and countries in search of work and a better future. This enriches the population, but it is also a challenge, because many of these people stay only for a period of their lives, and then they return to their places of origin. ■

*By Editor*

# A European Mariapolis

*70 years after the first Mariapolis was held in Italy's Dolomites, 2019 sees the Mariapolis returning to its place of origin and inviting participants from all over Europe. We interview Peter Forst, director of the Focolare Movement for Central Europe and one of the organizers of the event.*

## **Today's Europe appears very divided - with Brexit on one side and walls against immigration on the other. What is the point of having a European Mariapolis?**

It was the realisation of how divided Europe really is that gave birth to the idea of the European Mariapolis. We realised that here in Europe we hold very different opinions, sometimes opposing opinions, about developments in Europe with regard to migration, values, etc.

The primary purpose of the Mariapolis is to strengthen relationships, to create spaces for communion and sharing and to encourage all humanity to set out on the pathways of universal fraternity - of unity between individuals and between peoples. So we hope to be able to witness that it is possible to remain united - even if there are many differences between us.

## **How has the Mariapolis changed - from 1949 to 2019?**

The first Mariapolis was very spontaneous. Today more logistics are involved in the organisation and preparation of the programme. But we want the spirit of this European Mariapolis to be the same as that of 60 or 70 years ago: we want to experience and give witness to the fact that humanity is a family. How do we do it? Unconditional love.

## **Why have it in the Dolomites?**

The idea of having this Mariapolis in the same place as the first Mariapolis immediately felt right to all of us. Seventy years ago, in the summer of 1949, Chiara Lubich was on holiday with her first companions at Tonadico in the Dolomites. Together with the Italian parliamentarian Igino Giordani, they lived an experience of light, of extraordinary union with God and of profound unity. It was from this experience that the Focolare Movement grew.

It was not nostalgia that prompted us to choose the Dolomites, but the conviction that it is important in this period "after Chiara" to go back to our roots - to find the way forward and to find answers for today.

## **Who will participate? What is the programme? What do you mean by the title "Aim High"?**

The Mariapolis is open to everyone. There are 600 places for each of the four weeks. Registration is open until January 31st ([www.mariapolieuropea.org](http://www.mariapolieuropea.org)).

The programme will offer trips, sports, games, music, spirituality, prayers, creative workshops and forums on various themes – all to provide participants with opportunities for real encounters.

We thought that "Aim high" seemed to be a suitable title, reminding us to try to live all our relationships on higher levels - both spiritually and humanly speaking. Then, of course, once we are there in the mountains, we will aim high automatically! ■

Lorenzo Russo



# The pact of commitment to a new form of governance in our cities

*The meeting entitled “Co –governance - mutual responsibility in cities today” has ended with a written proposal to citizens and public administrators to both engage in and to create networks drawing together citizens, social partners and cities.*

“Politics is the love of loves that brings together the richness of people and groups in the unity of a shared project, allowing everyone to fulfil their vocation freely”\*. These challenging words of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare, resounded at the end of the “Co-Governance, co-responsibility in the cities today”, conference dedicated to participatory governance of cities promoted by the New Humanity Movement, the Movement for Politics and Policy for Unity and the Association of Cities for Fraternity, all outworkings of the social and political engagement of the Focolare. It was the first event of its kind that in two years time will be replicated in Brazil.

Over 400 public administrators, politicians, business people, academics and citizens from 33 countries participated in the event. The focus of the event was participation, presented in the many forms it can take and illustrated through stories and good practice shared by over 60 experts in the fields of town planning, communications, services, economics, politics and the environment.

“We are convinced that participation is a strategic choice, the best way to live well within cities - explained Lucia Fronza Crepaz, a former member of the Italian parliament and educator at the “School for Social Engagement” in Trent and member of the central committee of the event. “Participation is not seen as replacing procedures enabling representation, but is chosen as an effective way of addressing complex

problems and thus strengthening the concept of democratic delegation”.

The outcome of the event was the approval and signing of the “Pact for a new Governance” with which the participants committed themselves to engaging the interest of their own communities and public administrations. The 400 signatories to the pact committed themselves to form three networks to bring diversity together and respond to the complexity of reality.

They are networks of citizens: “People who live in the city while having different roles and tasks, but inspired by the same sense of responsibility”; networks of people working in particular sectors, forming groups in professional and economic spheres, the voluntary sector, faith communities, academia and universities, communications, etc.”; networks among cities themselves: “... that aim to engage citizens actively and collaboratively first by creating platforms that are accessible to all and easy to use. They will cooperate by overcoming particular interests and prejudices that undermine trust, which is an indispensable foundation for building a network. ■

*By Editor*

\* Info and texts of the conference: [www.co-governance.org](http://www.co-governance.org)



## To Nepal to build relationships

*The desire to share the discovery that has given meaning and joy to their lives – this is what drives someone to set out to give life to a temporary focolare. This way others too can experience the most beautiful of adventures - living for universal fraternity.*

They are young people, adults and families, who set off in small groups to visit distant countries where communities and villages await them. For a while they travel along the same road together, experiencing mutual acceptance and an exchange between the different cultures. They give of themselves to the others and they “make themselves one” with the others - in their joys and in their sorrows. They are certain that it is through loving our neighbours that each one of us finds our own full realisation. They believe that fraternity is possible between people of different faiths and beliefs and that the Golden Rule - “Do to others what you would have done to you” – exists for everyone to make it their own.

These small groups are the so-called “temporary focolares”, a travelling version of the traditional focolares. They function as central points of the Movement in various territories. They are like beating hearts sharing the life within them. In recent years there have been dozens of them, all following in the wake of the “pioneers” of the Focolare Movement who, ever since the 1950s, were sent out by Chiara Lubich like modern apostles to bring the charism of unity to different continents.

Nepal is a meeting point between the Mongolian populations of Asia and the Caucasian populations of the Indian plains. There is a profound sense of spirituality there with Buddhism practised side by side with Christianity and Hinduism. In 2018, from October 20 to November 7, a group of focolarini made their way to Nepal, travelling from the capital Kathmandu to Dharan, in the south, and then further north to Pokhara. Their goal was to build relationships.

Coming from India, Italy and Great Britain, the members of the focolare group immediately immersed themselves in the Nepalese culture. On their arrival the Dashain Hindu festival was in progress. It's the largest Hindu festival and it involves the whole country. The group participated in the Tika ritual, and received the traditional blessing.

In Dharan, the group was welcomed in parishes where they spoke of the history of the Focolare Movement and of its commitment to universal fraternity. They were met



with great enthusiasm from the people and the priests. In the capital, the group was joined by two Nepalese young people who had participated in the 2018 Genfest in Manila. They shared their experience with the students of a school run by Jesuit fathers.

In Pokhara they met with some Hindu families. Although they were poor and had very little to live on, harmony and dignity filled their homes. After the focolarini spoke about the ideal of unity, they were invited to have lunch together while listening to traditional music. The group then visited Bishop Paul Simick, the Apostolic Vicar of Nepal, who said he was happy about their presence in the country and invited them to meet the priests.

This journey to Nepal was a journey of mutual enrichment, where the ideal of unity met the local cultures. A Buddhist saying describes it effectively: Those who have “high” thoughts are not happy to remain in the same place. Instead, like the swans, they leave their own home and fly towards a higher home. ■

*Claudia Di Lorenzi*

# Sophia University Institute delegation visits Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

*The trip was promoted by the Patriarch Athenagoras-Chiara Lubich International Ecumenical Chair, which was established after Patriarch Bartholomew received an honorary doctorate in 2015.*

“Continue on the path you’ve taken on the way of dialogue, because it is reconciliation, true encounter, the ability to understand, divine philanthropy, welcoming others who are different, transfiguring the world, and welcoming God into human history. Bring this message to all those at all levels who participate in the work of your institute, with a fraternal embrace to Focolare Movement President Maria Voce, and all our brothers and sisters in the movement. The ecumenical patriarchate is your home as well, this city of Constantine is your city as well, because you are not foreigners, but friends.”

This was the final greeting that Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I gave to 30 professors and students of the Sophia University Institute (Loppiano), who are from a number of countries. Together with the institute’s director, Mons. Piero Coda, they had traveled to the patriarch’s residence at Phanar (Istanbul, Turkey).

The visit of the Sophia delegation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate was from 8–12. January It was promoted by the Patriarch Athenagoras-Chiara Lubich International Ecumenical Chair, which had been established after Patriarch Bartholomew received an honorary doctorate on October 26, 2015. It was established “to remember and restart the prophetic spirit that animated the extraordinary harmony of heart and mind between Patriarch Athenagoras I and Chiara Lubich, just before the Second Vatican Council and the historical meeting between the patriarch and Pope Paul VI.”

The academic trip included, among other things, together with the audience with the patriarch, a meeting with Metropolitan Gennadios Zervos, who was in Istanbul during that time for the Holy Synod. The group also met with Metropolitan Elpidophoros of Bursa on January 10, at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity on the island of Halki, Turkey. This meeting opened up productive possibilities of cooperation between the seminary and Sophia University Institute,

including a summer school that will probably be held in late spring 2020.

The visit was particularly significant in this fragile, tense moment that the Orthodox world is going through today. It is aiming once again to call for a commitment to tenaciously pursue a path of mutual understanding, and a reciprocal exchange of gifts to promote fraternity and communion. ■

*By Editor*







## Valdagno (Italy): A dream job

*Losing your job at 53 years of age, with three dependent children, would test anyone's resolve. But Mirco didn't allow himself to get discouraged. He went back to college and launched himself on a new career using dance to help people to connect and express their emotions.*

«Someone asked me, “Why don't you transform your passion into your work?” And so began the challenge – far from easy – to create a new professional identity for myself». Today Mirco Castello is an Art Counsellor, but only after losing his “secure” job in the textile and fashion industry in 2008, after which it became harder and harder to balance the family budget. «I tried to listen to the advice people were giving me, but most of all to a “voice” inside of me which kept prompting me not to miss this opportunity. In fact, for many years I had dedicated my spare time to my real passion: mime, acting and dance. I started looking for ways of transforming this passion into a service which could meet the needs of others, particularly of children. I launched a dance and music play project in a nursery and primary school». As child psychologists maintain, dance has the power to help children find new balance and harmony within themselves.

But a good idea and enthusiasm are not enough. To work in a professional educational environment, the right credentials are required. So Mirco went back to college, successfully studying for an Arts Counsellor diploma and a Masters degree in Family Mediation. He then contacted schools across Italy, in both the state and private sectors, he set up his own website ([www.ledanzedimirco.it](http://www.ledanzedimirco.it)), and began offering training for teachers and sessions for children.

«Since 2008 I've been managing – just – to make a living for my family, always hoping that no unexpected expense will crop up. But I have to say that we've never actually been lacking. With the profound relationship of unity with my wife,

and with my friends in the Focolare Movement to sustain me, I've been able to entrust myself completely to God. I find He shows me the steps I have to take. Through my work, I can testify to the experience that He loves me and does not abandon me. I consider Him to be my new employer!”

Currently, Mirco is running a project in Italy and other European countries involving 2,000 children annually. «I engage children in play through music and can immediately recognise many forms of unhappiness. How children suffer these days! So many are lacking in values, the security of boundaries and rules, their own autonomy, or are living through the separation or even conflict between their parents”.

Together with his wife, Mirco also runs a project for adults, facilitating «openness, assertiveness, understanding, forgiveness». And Mirco's horizons continue to widen. “You know, for ten years, my wife and I could not even think about taking a holiday. Now, we've been invited to go to Kenya in January, to work with children in two schools and an orphanage. We've also received another invitation to go to Russia. Tell me, if this is not the love of my new employer!” ■

*Chiara Favotti*





## A man of the Gospel

*A mild-mannered yet decisive man, profoundly convinced that the Gospel is one of the most revolutionary books ever written containing the power to change the world, Marco Aquini lived all his life for this. He left us a month ago, on 4 January.*

Meeting Marco left its mark. He was one of those rare people whose gaze reached right inside you and touched your heart. A man of few words, he would approach any problem you had with a gentle, practical approach. Any advice he gave was never imposed on you, rather it served to help you draw out solutions from within yourself.

Marco was born in 1958 in Udine, Italy. He was one of the first young people to get to know the Focolare Movement in the Friuli region, where the people are known for being serious, industrious and self-disciplined. From a young age he experienced the hard blows that life can bring when his father was killed in a serious accident. But his encounter with the spirituality of the Focolare Movement proved to be a turning point in his life. In 1978, during a summer program with the Gen (the young people of the Focolare Movement), Marco discerned the calling to give himself to God as a Focolarino. At the same time, together with others, he responded to Chiara Lubich's invitation to sign a pledge to remain faithful to God to the end of his life, which has become known in the Focolare Movement as the "Pact to be faithful right to the end". On that occasion, Marco wrote to Chiara, "Before I got to know the 'Ideal' (the Focolare spirituality), I was closed within my own gilded world. Living the Ideal, I'm now coming out of myself. I go back home conscious of having the powerful potential to change the world in which I live".

From his early years as a Focolarino, his contribution was always whole-hearted and passionate, firstly in Germany, then back in Italy at the Movement's Centre, where he was involved in establishing two organizations to assist those most in need and to promote peace: AMU ('Associazione Mondo Unito' / 'United World Association'),

and 'New Humanity' the Focolare's NGO accredited to the United Nations.

For many years he served as counsellor for the aspect of "Communion of Goods, Economy and Work" at the Focolare's international centre, and was for some years co-responsible for the Youth for a United World movement. From 2000 he sat beside Chiara and Eli to read news stories in the regular "Link Up" video conference calls with the whole family of the Focolare Movement worldwide.

Another personal tragedy was to profoundly affect Marco's life: the unexplained disappearance of his sister, Chiara, who had long endured fragile health. Together with his mother, he suffered greatly as the search continued until, sadly, her body was found. Even in this situation, Marco managed to hold on to his belief in the love of God, which gave him the strength to support his family. Later, together with his mother, Franca, Marco helped to set up a day centre, named after his sister, to provide support and social integration for people with physical and psychological disabilities, as part of the "Together We Can Association", which Marco never ceased to accompany, even at a distance.

In Rome, at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Urbe, he was Visiting Lecturer on courses in International Cooperation for Development and Sociology of Development. Most recently, he joined the team of Città Nuova, bringing his economic expertise to the administration of the Focolare magazine. Throughout his life, he never failed to find ways to love the weakest and suffering neighbours, including regularly offering the benefit of his skills and experience to a Caritas outreach group near Rome.

In November 2018, he communicated to his friends the discovery of a life-threatening illness. He faced this new step on the journey with a renewed choice of God, and despite being in great pain, he also expressed finding great joy. Maria Voce in her telegram to the worldwide Focolare community, chose to emphasize his vocation as a Focolarino, as well as his sober, honest and straight forward nature which was expressed so well in the Gospel phrase Chiara offered for him to live: Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No' (Mt 5:37), and how he lived his illness in such an extraordinary manner.

The last phase of Marco's life left those around him speechless as they witnessed the rapid unstoppable deterioration of his health over two months, until he reached the heavenly goal on the morning of 4 January. His funeral was attended by people of all kinds, all linked to him in different ways and all somehow "roped together" with him to climb, no longer his beloved high mountains, but the highs and lows of this life, accompanied by his luminous and authentic example. ■

*Patrizia Mazzola*

\*La spiritualità dei Focolari

## A bishop dedicated to dialogue

*Archbishop Armando Bortolaso died on January 8, after almost 70 years in “his” beloved land, the Middle East. For 10 years he was Apostolic Vicar in Syria.*

How can someone manage to live for almost 70 years in such a long-suffering land? “For someone in religious life, it’s not a question of how long, but of mission. You need to be there where people most need to be loved.” That was how Archbishop Armando Bortolaso described his vocation in 2013 – explaining the deepest meaning of his choices as a person, priest and bishop. He left us on January 8 at the age of 91, at the El Houssein house of the Salesians in Beirut, after having lived almost 70 years in “his” land, the Middle East.

Born in the Veneto region in northeast Italy in 1926, he went to Jerusalem in 1948. He had joined the Salesians and celebrated his first mass in 1953 in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, before taking on various roles in Israel, Lebanon and Syria.

“A man of dialogue,” “a front-line bishop,” “builder of unity”. Those remembering him describe him in a number of ways that offer profound insights into this humble, open man. He had an unshakable faith in unity, which he lived and preached as the one destiny of all peoples, especially his beloved Syrians. He lived with them for 22 years, 10 of which were as Apostolic Vicar. “Syria is my second homeland,” he affirmed in an interview. “To know that ‘my’ people are wracked by suffering; to see Aleppo, a blessed city, reduced to ruins, and the churches destroyed, these cherished ancient Christian churches, makes my heart ache. This is also because of the widespread indifference to this tragedy as it is happening.”

Due to his vast knowledge of the Middle East, Archbishop Bortolaso was able to analyse the causes of conflicts clearly and soberly while identifying ways toward solutions. He also had an enlightened and prophetic approach, the result of his firm faith in the love of God, who never forsakes his children even in the most desperate of circumstances.



Following the war in 2006, he wrote from Lebanon to Fr. Arrigo, a priest in Vicenza. “Amid the many disasters in this war, we have witnessed something wonderful and new. Many Muslims are searching for and finding refuge with Christians who, setting aside the painful scars of the civil war took in the refugees and befriended them. This living together as brothers and sisters is something very new and would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. For now it is just a small seed, yet tomorrow it could become a giant cedar, extending its branches throughout this land famous for its cedars.”

Armando Bortolaso learned of the Focolare spirituality in Belgium at the end of the 1960s. You could say that unity and dialogue became his life’s compass. For many years he was committed to the life of fellowship among the bishop friends of the Focolare, to the point that a group of bishops in the Middle East grew up around him in Lebanon, also wanting to go deeper into the spirituality of unity.

In another interview about the complex situation of the war in Syria, he said, “I always thought that those who direct their lives towards unity are cantered on the heart of Jesus. So I said to myself, ‘you are not the only the Bishop of the Latins, but the bishop of Jesus, and Jesus has 22 million people here in Syria.’ I have tried to live in unity always and with everyone – my priests, the religious, the faithful, with the bishops and with Christians of the Orthodox and Protestant Churches, and with Muslims.” ■

*Stefania Tanesini*

*The section “Witnesses / Lives lived,” where we give brief, personal profiles of members of the Focolare Movement after their death, has had to be suspended, we hope temporarily. This is in accordance with the new laws concerning the protection of privacy and the protection of personal data pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Once the legal aspects have been further studied, we are confident we will be able to resume this section, which is highly appreciated by our readers.*

*The editorial office*

# Korea: The Sung Sim Dang bakery's special guest

On January 24 Korean President Moon Jae-in visited the Sum Sim Dang bakery, which is part of the Focolare's Economy of Communion project.

For a business owner, it goes without saying that having the president of the republic visit your business is an exceptional event. But if that visit happens on the president's birthday, it's even more so! That's exactly what happened in Daejeon to Amata Kim and Fedes Im, two Korean entrepreneurs who are part of the Economy of Communion and run the well-known bakery Sung Sim Dang.

Moon Jae-in, who has been South Korea's president since May 2017, is known in the West for starting the peace process with North Korea after almost 70 years of cold war. He celebrated his birthday at Sung Sim Dang with a magnificent cake and was able to get to know the business's history and reality up close. His Instagram post got more than 76,000 likes in just a few hours.

"I was pleasantly surprised today to celebrate my birthday at the Sung Sim Dang bakery in Daejeon," he said. "During the war in 1950 my father and the bak-



ery's founder (Fedes' father) were on the same evacuation ship, Victoria, fleeing North Korea. Remembering this moment of history is for us is something we hold dear and precious. My birthday is a day like any other, but today I am recharged with new strength from the well wishes of so many. Thank you!"

The event resonated widely in the media, partly because Sung Sim Dang is universally recognized and highly valued throughout the city of Daejeon. ■

*Antonella Ferrucci*

Source: [www.edc-online.org](http://www.edc-online.org)

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*Dear Mariapolis newsletter readers,  
Thank you for your generous support over many years towards the printing and circulation of the Mariapolis Newsletter. As you know, there is now a section of the new website dedicated to the Mariapolis Newsletter: [www.focolare.org/en/mariapoli/](http://www.focolare.org/en/mariapoli/)  
The most important articles published online will be included in this newsletter in a printable PDF*

*format. You can download it from the site or receive it by email by subscribing directly on the site.*

*We are very grateful to all those who wish to continue supporting the work of the Communications Office, and contribute in this way to spreading the charism of unity.*

*The Editor Office*

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