

CHRISTIANS LIVING IN COMMUNION

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 (see Jn 13:34), Jesus' promise of "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.

"Every church throughout the centuries," Chiara Lubich asserted in Austria in 1997, "has been, in a certain way, frozen in itself by waves of indifference, misunderstanding and even reciprocal hatred. What's needed, therefore, is for everyone to add extra 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 ready."

History: In 1961 in Darmstadt, Germany, a group of Evangelical Lutherans heard Chiara Lubich and were touched by her proposal to make life revolve around the word of God. That same year "Centro Uno" (the ecumenical center of the Focolare) was founded in Rome, dedicated to unity among Christians – a "house" where Christians of various churches could feel welcomed and at "home." Igino Giordani directed the center up until his death in 1980.

In 1955, the Movement spread to the Swiss Reformed Church. In 1966 Chiara met the primate of the Church of England, Archbishop Michael Ramsey. All the subsequent Archbishops of Canterbury have encouraged the Focolare to spread its spirituality in the Anglican Church. In 1967 Chiara Lubich met some of the directors of the Ecumenical Council of Churches for the first time in Geneva, Switzerland.

The history of the close relationship between the Focolare Movement and the Greek Orthodox Church began when Chiara Lubich met Athenagoras I, Patriarch of Constantinople. "It was June 13, 1967," she said. "He welcomed me as if we had always known each other. 'I've been waiting for you,' he exclaimed, and he asked that I 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.

New developments: Over the years, ecumenical "schools" were established and shorter courses of formation in ecumenism were held in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas.

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

In 1968, an ecumenical town began in Ottmaring, Germany, as desired by both the members of 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 (see Jn 17).

1999 marked the beginning of the communion among movements and new communities within various churches. This collaboration is called "Together for Europe" and is based on living reciprocal love among all Christians, while promoting the common good, defending life at all stages, supporting families, aiding the vulnerable, safeguarding the environment, working for peace and for an equitable economy for all.

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