

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Purpose and objectives: Thousands of believers from various religions share the spirit of the Focolare, inasmuch as it relates to their faith, and collaborate actively to achieve its goal of universal brotherhood.

The dialogue that the Focolare promotes is based on its spirituality, focusing in particular on love. This resonates immediately with persons of other religions and cultures because of the Golden Rule, formulated in many ways, but often stated as: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” By living these words together with persons of other faiths, a very constructive dialogue is established.

Some of the effects of this dialogue are rediscovering one’s own religious roots, as well as understanding all that unites us, and living an experience of fraternity. This spirit of communion contributes then toward accomplishing more unity within the human family.

Their joint commitment to be builders of unity and peace has an effect in places where violence and racial or religious intolerance attempt to dig an abyss between persons and groups. Significant humanitarian projects have developed from these efforts to live brotherhood.

Over the years, dialogue has opened up and developed with Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists, with Shiite and Sunni Muslims, with Jews who are orthodox, conservative or reformed, with various currents of Hinduism, and with followers of the traditional African religions. There have been also contacts with Shinto Buddhists, Sikhs and members of the Baha’i faith.

History: In 1977 Chiara Lubich was awarded the Templeton Prize in London for progress in religion. As she was presenting her experience to a large audience, including persons of various religions, she had the profound intuition that all those present were one family. As she exited, the first to express their appreciation for her talk were believers of different religious traditions.

This was a confirmation that the Focolare spirituality could also be lived not only by Christians, but, in some way, by people of other faiths. This event was for her a sign from God, helping her understand that the Movement needed to open itself up to dialogue with people of every religious tradition.

New developments: A permanent school for interreligious dialogue has been established at the Focolare’s little city of Tagaytay, near Manila in the Philippines. It is also a meeting place for people who want to spread the spirituality of unity in Asia.

Since 2002, the Movement has sponsored a number of symposia: Jewish-Christian, Islamic-Christian, Buddhist-Christian and Hindu-Christian. These international conferences promote reciprocal knowledge, deepen dialogue, further friendship, and increase interreligious and intercultural fraternity.

The “Wings of Unity” project involves educators and scholars who are both Muslim and Christian. They are following a path of dialogue and collaboration. It is co-directed by Rev. Dr. Piero Coda, rector of Sophia University Institute, and Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali, director of the Islamic Centre of England. Innovative paths in dialogue are being opened through seminars, public conferences, a summer

course and various publications. Support for the project comes from Sophia University Institute, the Islamic Centre of England in London, and the Risalat International Institute in Qum, Iran.

Religions for Peace, which began as the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), works to promote peace through interreligious collaboration. The Focolare Movement has collaborated with it since 1982. In 1994 Chiara Lubich was named an honorary president. In 2013 Maria Voce was named a co-president of the Religions for Peace's World Council.

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