

MARIA VOCE

President of the Focolare Movement

Maria Voce was elected president of the Focolare Movement during its General Assembly in 2008. She is the first focolarina to succeed the foundress, Chiara Lubich, who passed away during that same year. The 2014 General Assembly re-elected her for a second term.

The first of seven children, she was born in Aiello Calabro (Cosenza, Italy) on July 16, 1937. Her father was a doctor; her mother a housewife.

Struck by the gospel witness of some fellow students, members of the Focolare Movement, whom she met during her university years in Rome, Maria Voce started to live the spirit of the Movement. At the age of 26, she felt God was calling her and left a very promising career - she was the first woman lawyer at Cosenza's Court - to follow him in the way of the Focolare. Chiara gave her the name "Emmaus", which recalls the event of the two disciples, who on the way to the village of Emmaus, encountered Jesus after his resurrection and recognized his presence in their midst through the breaking of the bread.

After 8 years in Sicily, for 6 years she was one of Chiara Lubich's personal secretariat. Then, she spent ten years in Istanbul, where she established ecumenical relationships with Demetrio I, who at that time was the Patriarch of Constantinople and many other metropolitans, among them, Bartholomew I, who is now the Patriarch. During these years, she also had the precious opportunity to establish direct contact and relationship with the Islamic world.

In 1988, she resumed her collaboration at the Centre of the Movement. From 1995 to 2008 she was a member of the *Abba School*, an interdisciplinary study centre founded by Chiara Lubich. Her studies in theology and in canon law were an asset for this work. From 2000 to 2008 she was co-responsible for the International commission, "Communion and Law", a network of academics and professionals involved in law.

She worked directly with Lubich to update the Movement's General Statutes from 2002 till the time of their approval in 2007.

When she was elected president of the Focolare Movement (July 7, 2008), she was received by Pope Benedict XVI.

On her re-election as president (September 12, 2014), she was received by Pope Francis in a private audience together with about 500 General Assembly participants, among them the newly elected councilors whom she presented to the Pope. On this occasion, the Holy Father entrusted the Focolare with these three keywords: *contemplate, go out, educate*.