

Maria Voce

President of the Focolare Movement

Maria Voce was elected president of the Focolare Movement during the General Assembly held in 2008, after the Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich passed away. She was re-elected for a second term in 2014.

Maria Voce was born in Aiello Calabro (Cosenza, Italy) on July 16, 1937.

In the 50's, while studying law at university in Rome, she met some young members of the Focolare Movement. Struck by the gospel witness of these fellow students, she also started to follow the Focolare spirit. Maria Voce was the first woman lawyer at Cosenza's Court. At the age of 26, she decided to leave a very promising career and become a fully committed member of the Movement, living the spirituality of the charism of unity that aims at contributing to the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer: "That all may be one" (Jn 17,21).

After 8 years working for the Movement in Sicily, she was called to work in Chiara Lubich's personal secretariat. In 1978, she was entrusted with the responsibility of the Movement in Istanbul, where for ten years she contributed intensely towards the dialogue between the Focolare Movement and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, that was started by Chiara. Her important and frequent contacts with Bartholomew I, who is now the Patriarch, proved to be very fruitful in ecumenical dialogue. During these years, she also had the opportunity to establish direct contact and relationship with the Islamic world.

In 1988, she was called back to the Focolare International Centre at Rocca di Papa, Rome. 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 2007, when amendments were approved.

From the time she was elected president in July 2008, Maria Voce has been travelling quite a lot. She has been to various places in the five continents to visit Focolare communities and support them in their religious and social commitments. Her visits to communities living in difficult situations aroused particular interest in all the Movement; among these, the ones she made to the Middle East. Her last visit to Syria and Lebanon was in May 2019.

Travels, conferences organized by the Movement or other institutions gave Maria Voce the opportunity to meet and establish direct contact with various important personalities that come from different backgrounds: ecclesial, ecumenical, interreligious and civil.