

Press Release – February 28, 2017

The Focolare's New Ecumenical Commitment

From Ottmaring, Germany, a declaration following the track of the Lund event and other important Ecumenical steps in progress

«I think we need a change of heart, to begin to think ecumenically». Maria Voce said these words in Germany when she was being interviewed on *the Ottmaring Declaration*. With them she expressed in a nutshell the motivations behind this Declaration, which speaks of the Focolare's renewed ecumenical commitment, one strongly reinforced by the continuous gestures and words of Pope Francis, as witnessed last Sunday when he visited All Saints Anglican Church, in Rome.

The Focolare Movement's General Council spent the last week of February at the Ottmaring Ecumenical Centre (near Augsburg), founded by Chiara Lubich. Here, for almost fifty years, Catholic and Evangelical Christians, who base their living together on Jesus' New Commandment, have been witnessing that unity which already exists among believers in Jesus Christ. This Ecumenical Centre was the seat where preparations took place to celebrate *the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed in 1999.

The Focolare Movement chose this exquisite ecumenical context to express explicitly, in a form of declaration, the renewal of a responsibility and a commitment that asks and encourages a greater effort towards full communion among Christians.

The Ottmaring Declaration states: *«The October 2016 meeting in Lund, Sweden, between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation was particularly significant in view of this year, 2017, in which the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is commemorated. The Joint Declaration made in Lund bears witness to the mutual trust established and calls each respective community to 'further growth in communion rooted in Baptism' and to 'witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ'. In this way, it is possible to become faithful heralds 'of God's boundless love for all humanity'».*

This declaration continues to affirm: *«As a worldwide movement that includes Christians of many Churches, we already live this reality of a Christian people united through mutual love. We feel strongly called to respond to the Lund Declaration. We see it as a true "kairos", a sign that God is urging Christians today to work harder for the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer, 'that all may be one'. We will do all that is within our power to sustain the Churches' efforts to bring about full, visible communion, for the good of all humanity».*

Consequently, it assures very explicitly that: *«We will do everything possible to ensure that all the Movement's actions, projects and events, at international level but especially locally, demonstrate this open and fraternal relationship among Christians. We will continue to work for fellowship among Movements and Christian Communities throughout the world, devoting special attention to the "Together for Europe" ecumenical network. We entrust to God our Churches' ecumenical journey, to hasten the day when we can share together in one chalice».*

This Ottmaring Declaration, together with a letter from Maria Voce, have been sent to Pope Francis, to Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, to the Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Bishop Munib A. Younan, president of the Lutheran World Federation and to Rev. Martin Junge, federation general secretary, to Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches and to other leaders, as an expression of this renewed ecumenical commitment.

In fact, when interviewed in Germany Maria Voce spoke very clearly about the Movement's commitment when she said: *«There can't be a single person in the Focolare who, after hearing this Declaration, can think in good conscience before God that the task of ecumenism only regards those lands with Christians from different Churches, but not their country; that it is of no personal concern to them, because they're fine in their own Churches and not interested in such things».*

The full text of the [Ottmaring Declaration](#) is attached to this Press release.

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