

## Maria Voce in the Holy Land

With Jews, Christians and Muslims, friends of the Movement

Meetings with religious and civil leaders

At the Hebrew University, a talk addressing the role of dialogue

**The president of the Focolare Movement, Maria Voce, and its co-president Giancarlo Faletti payed official visit to the Holy Land.** As part of their busy schedule they met the movement's local community present throughout Israel and in the Palestinian Territories. In Bethlehem, where the movement is particularly present, people arrived from Ramallah, Gaza, Galilee, Jerusalem and other cities for the meeting.

**In Haifa Maria Voce took part in a meeting with sixty friends of the movement from different religious creeds. The participants were members of Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities,** who have been involved for some time now in a very fruitful interreligious dialogue, showing just how much good will and of the desire for peace can develop and bear fruit. Noteworthy was the meeting that this same group held during the Gaza Crisis 2008 where they prayed together for peace; a unique event in the midst of such terrible circumstances.

Maria Voce and Giancarlo Faletti had personal meetings with representatives of the Catholic community and leaders in the ecumenical world as well as with important Jewish and Muslim figures and members of the civil and political authorities.

**The president was also warmly received by the various local representatives of the Roman Church:** the apostolic Nuncio, Mons. Antonio Franco, and the Latin Patriarch, Mons. Fouad Twal, who with these words, set the tone for the all the scheduled meetings, "The people's concerns are our concerns. It's as if the ascent to Calvary has never ended here in the Holy Land". The president also encountered old and new charisms; of particular significance was the meeting with the Custos of the Holy Land, Friar Pizzaballa and with delegates of more recent charisms and new church communities. These meetings were characterised by a simple exchange of experiences about their adventures in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

**Jerusalem is also an ecumenical city. The patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church Theophilos III received Maria Voce,** expressing his desire to grasp onto the "unity of Christians" and specified, "in Christ', in his love". There was an intense meeting between Maria Voce and the Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran World Federation who commented, "I see a strong temptation in people to be concerned only with material goods. But no, here we have need of God. Muslims and Jews don't stop to ask whether we are Catholic or Lutheran, we are first and foremost Christian". At the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate Maria Voce spent some time with Bishop Aris Shiryanian, chief assistant of the elderly Patriarch Torkom I Manughian.

**Jewish World- at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem:** The prestigious Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, in collaboration with The Centre for the Study of Christianity, invited Maria Voce to give a lecture on “The Role of Dialogue in Fostering Peace”, chaired by professor Manuela Consonni. Among the eighty odd present at the lecture were the Nuncio Mons. Antonio Franco, the auxiliary Bishop of Israel Mons. Giacinto Boulos Marcuzzo, Rabbi David Rosen, Ms. Debbie Weissmann, president of the ICCJ (International Council of Christians and Jews), rabbis and Jewish intellectuals, directors of Christian communities and congregations. The institute that hosted the event expresses the interest that many important figures, especially those in the Jewish world, show in the Focolare Movement after decades of its presence in the Holy Land; a presence marked by numerous and lasting contacts with individual Christians, Jews and Muslims as well as with institutions and associations committed to dialogue, especially those involved in interreligious dialogue. Noteworthy was the meeting at the ICCI (Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel) with Rabbi Ron Kronish.

**Maria Voce then met with the deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Ms. Naomi Tsur;** a very open figure who wishes to create a network of cities who, in partnership can become “Cities of Pilgrimage”. **Maria Voce met other politicians in Bethlehem, one of the cities under Palestinian administration.** Present were the Minister for Tourism, Ms. Khouloud Daibes; the advisor to the president for religious affairs, Ziad Al-Bandak; the head of police; mayors including the Mayor of Bethlehem, Victor Batarseh and local government officers. This meeting, whose participants were both Christian and Muslim, was organised by the John Paul II Foundation which, since 2007 has been lead by Father Ibrahim Faltas.

In the second week of their stay, Maria Voce and the Focolare Movement’s General Council dedicated some days to a spiritual retreat and to a visit through the Holy Land’s religious sites. They remained in Jerusalem until 1<sup>st</sup> March.

**Available for journalists:**

- *On su [www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org):*
  - photos
  - Maria Voce’s speech at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**For further information:**

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