

Press Release, March 11, 2016

Chiara Lubich and her dream of a united world

Hundreds of events worldwide to manifest that peace is not a utopia.

“A woman of dauntless faith, a meek messenger of hope and peace” - this is how Pope Benedict XVI described Chiara Lubich in his message at her funeral eight years ago. In January 2015, on the occasion of the official opening of the cause of her beatification, Pope Francis urged *“to make known to the people of God the life and work of one who welcomed Our Lord’s invitation and enkindled a new light for the church on the journey towards unity”*.

The various events commemorating her passing away on March 14, 2008, confirm the gradual fulfillment of her dream: *“to see universal brotherhood established gradually, or possibly even hurriedly, in the world”*.

“A message of dialogue and peace” is the title of the meeting organized by the Focolare community in **Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**. This Community, composed of Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims and people with no religious belief, will share the result of years of commitment lived side by side by its various members. The public is invited to attend, and Archbishop Cardinal Vinko Puljić is expected to participate. The firm belief in this message is passed through an ongoing dialogue, even in other Balkan countries, and it leads to mutual recognition of traditions and nationalities.

Pearls, an educational programme carried out in Skopje, Macedonia shows this. It consists of an early childhood programme for children of various ethnic groups. It is linked to the university and also involves the families. Based on Lubich’s ideal of universal brotherhood, it was initiated by Professor Aziz Shehu, a Muslim who was then lecturer and pro-dean at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

In early March, 110 young Croats, Serbs, Ruthenians, Albanians and Macedonians also gave witness of this irreversible process when, for the first time, with others from Bulgaria and Rumania, they came together under the banner, *the Balkans: we are one*

The Focolare Community in Europe is promoting more than 200 events. *“We live for Unity”* is the title of the meeting in Minsk, Belarus. Meetings will be held in the six cities where Focolare Communities are present in Sweden. In Munich, there will be the first *“Chiaratag”*. Journalists and qualified members of the Justice and Peace Commission will take part in the round table conference *“Chiara and peace”* held in Lisbon, Portugal. In Seville, Spain the theme will be *“Chiara Lubich, educator for peace”*. Allal Baschar, Imam of the Mosque of King Abdul Aziz al Saud of Marbella and Fr. Manuel Palma Ramírez, deputy director of the Seville Theological Studies Centre will be two speakers during this meeting.

There is no family at **Medellin, Colombia**, who has not lost at least one of its members during these 50 years of conflict. So, even among the Focolare communities, one finds three generations with stories similar to that of Rosa, who had her son murdered by a friend but did not fall a victim of vengeance. She braved the situation with the courage of forgiveness while she worked in the social services centre of the neighbourhood to spread reconciliation, care, culture. Educational projects set up in different cities of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Mexico see generations of children grow up into professionals and teachers and assume the task of promoting an education that leads to fraternity and peace.

Numerous meetings, symposia, conferences and concerts will be held in the Americas. These events vary from spiritual and prayerful to interfaith or environmental. They will take place from New York to San Francisco in U.S.A, from Santiago, Chile to La Habana, Cuba, Neza in the Mexican State of Nezahualcoyotl, Caracas in Venezuela, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Mendoza in Argentina.

Very significant are the meetings to be held in the Pacific Islands of Honolulu, Hawaii, and in Noumea, New Caledonia.

Australia will focus on peace and fellowship, with appointments in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. The meeting in Perth, organized by youth, will be held in the central Northbridge Square. *Politics for Unity:*

Making a World of Difference will be the theme for the conferences held in Wellington and in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Thirty-one communities present in various regions of **South Korea** will animate the events that are meant to deepen the bond between Chiara Lubich and peace.

The symposium at De La Salle University in Manila, the Philippines will focus on *“The Charism of Unity: a timeless legacy”* and delve into the Movement’s fifty years history in the continent of Asia.

In Vietnam, 300 people from all over the country will be meeting in Vung Tau for several days to share and live together the spirituality of unity.

In Pakistan, spiritual meetings and Masses for peace are to be held in seven cities.

Events are also scheduled to take place in **Burkina Faso**, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and also in other places.

Inspired by the current situation of social tension, Burundi choose the theme: *Merciful like our Heavenly Father, we are builders of peace.*

A telephone conference call will unite, the big cities of the Democratic Rep. of Congo: Lubumbashi, Goma, Kinshasa and Kikwit. Here, 1500 people, among them ambassadors, members of UNESCO, representatives of different Christian denominations and Muslim authorities, will reflect on Peace in the family.

The widespread presence of the Focolare communities in Italy stimulates numerous initiatives. In Rome, the meeting place for 280 young people will be the Italian Parliament where they will meet Laura Boldini, the president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Paolo Gentiloni, the Minister of foreign affairs and other members of Parliament. The three main speakers, who will discuss the manifesto containing concrete proposals on peace, disarmament and industrial reconversion are Pasquale Ferrara, a diplomat, Michele Zanzucchi, the director of Città Nuova and Shahrzad Houshmand, a Muslim theologian.

Antonio M. Baggio will lecture to law students at the University of Pisa about: *The love of loves. The religious and secular nature of politics in Chiara Lubich.*

“Religions dialogue in favour of peace and the environment” will be the event at the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa. During this event, Husein Salah, president of the Islamic Community, Giuseppe Momigliano, the chief Rabbi, Gnanathilaka Mahauswewe, a Buddhist monk, Andrea Ponta, an environmental engineer and Roberto Catalano from the Interreligious Dialogue Centre of the Focolare Movement will give, a reflection on *Laudato Si.*

“Me through you” is the title of an itinerate event in Milan, which is a sort of “embrace” to the city and an interaction between different groups. There will be more dialogue, integration and forgiveness during the series of events *“Is my world like yours?... steps towards getting to know one another better”*.

Members of the diplomatic Corps accredited to Italy and to the Holy See and representatives of the cultural world will meet at the Auditorium of the Mariapoli Centre at Castelgandolfo, Rome, where they will be welcomed by Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement. Chiara Lubich will be commemorated through *The Culture of dialogue as a factor of peace.*

Whilst armed conflicts continue to cause havoc and kill hope **in the Middle East**, the Focolare communities in Syria affirm: *“Even we are responsible to contribute towards peace. If we believe in God, the Lord of history who can conquer evil and hear our prayers, we would commit a sin of omission if we do not turn at all times to Him, who makes the impossible become possible and helps us to achieve our aim of uniting humanity into one family. So let us pray, while we change our hearts and share our goods”*.

The events of March 14, 2016 make sense because they aim at converging the efforts and prayers of many people, in many places on earth, to make the world become more united.

Meanwhile, the cause of the beatification of Chiara Lubich, which began on January 27, 2015 is following the required process. Witness has already been offered by persons who are members of different Churches and by others who have no particular religious conviction. A mosaic of testimonies highlight her exemplary life, a commitment shared with all those whom God placed in her path to “become saints together”.

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