

Press Release – April 26, 2017

“Change your heart. Change the world.”

From April 30 to May 7, 2017 United World Week organized by the youth and teenagers of the Focolare Movement. Launching Genfest 2018 to be held in Manila three months before the Synod of Bishops on Youth.

“The basic theme for United World Week is peace. We will be discussing interior peace, world peace, local peace. We would like to show that peace generates personal and social change; it produces an economy that focuses on the wellbeing of the human person and a politics of service to individuals and communities; it stimulates integration and renewal processes”.

These words, which stem from daily actions in favour of fraternity and peace in many places of the world, were shared by the young organizers of the international meeting that traditionally opens the United World Week worldwide. This year, this event will take place in Loppiano, Florence on 29-30 April, and 500 participants from 30 countries are expected to be present.

United World Week came into being after Genfest 1995 and since then it has been contributing towards giving visibility to initiatives started by individuals and groups. One of these initiatives is “*the Besom*” which was founded by the young James Odgers in the United Kingdom in 1987 “*to sweep away suffering*”. On the Besom’s website one reads: “*Poverty, isolation, abuse, ill health, injustice, homelessness; we all see the sharp inequalities of life around us and the devastating impacts they have on people’s lives. Many of us want to do something but we do not always know how. The Besom exists to help you make a difference in the life of others*”. There are over 30 different Besoms scattered around the country, thanks to the commitment and collaboration of many volunteers. (www.besom.com)

From April 30 to May 7, 2017, the youth of the Focolare Movement will animate initiatives wherever Focolare communities are present. These will be carried out in collaboration with groups, movements, associations and institutions, often through ecumenical and interreligious participation and the involvement of civil and religious authorities. Among these initiatives, there will be the traditional May 1st event at Loppiano, where more than 3000 young people are expected to participate in the “Pulse”, an event having interreligious and social characteristics through the commitment and presence of various imam and youth from Italian Islamic Communities. “Pulse” will also be a visible sign of welcome and integration through flash mob, a symbol of the migrant peoples’ journey. Another similar example is the one to be held at Santa Lucia Uatlan, a city in south-west Guatemala, where the majority of the population are of indigenous descent. A thousand are expected to be present.

The world relay Run4Unity (www.run4unity.net), animated mainly by children and teenagers, will be held on May 7 between 11.00 and 12.00 in each time zone. Thousands of participants will manifest their commitment towards building peace and working together for solidarity. The main rule for each activity is the so called “*Golden Rule*” which says “*do unto others what you would like others to do unto you*”. This world relay will start from Perth, where children and teenagers from Oceania will run together with refugee families from Syria and Iraq with whom they already do many activities. At Mexicali, Mexico and Calexico, USA, cities divided by the wall that delimits the border between the two countries, “*we, young people, who are tired of hearing racist words and of disunity between two very different countries but where we live well together on the border, will run together in two groups for about two kilometres along the wall that divides these two countries. We want to show that although a wall divides us, we stand together for a united world*”.

The 2017 edition of United World Week will also be an occasion to launch the logo of the coming Genfest, the international youth meeting organized by the Focolare Movement to be held in Manila, the Philippines, in July 2018. The youth of the Asian continent will be the main protagonists of this Genfest, held just three months before the Synod of Bishops to which Pope Francis invites young people, all young people to make themselves heard, because “*every young person has something to say to others... We all need to hear you!*” This invitation is a call considered even by Focolare youth as “*an occasion of hope and confidence to build a new and transparent relationship between the Church and young people, while encouraging us to give our contribution*”.

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