

Press Release - February 24, 2016

“Always keep alive the charism of unity”

Bishops from 4 continents at the Conference being held presently at Castelgandolfo – Rome
(22-26 February 2016)

60 Bishop-friends of the Focolare Movement, coming from 31 countries¹, are presently gathered at Castelgandolfo (22-26 February). The participation at the General Audience held by Pope Francis at St. Peter's Square has been the central point of this meeting. In his address the Pope urged the Bishops *“to always keep alive the charism of unity in the apostolic ministry, in communion with the successor of Peter”*.

«A synodal Church is a Church that listens, that realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn». This type of Church, as defined by the Pope during the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, indicates the track to be followed during this conference.

The choice of the title *“A Church that generates unity”* stems from the belief that, at a time marked by tensions and increasing disintegration, the people of God are called to contribute in a vital manner towards building relationships at all levels and in all environments. This has to be lived, first of all, within the Church itself and its source must be in the heart of a merciful God. The core of this theme lies in understanding Jesus' prayer to the Father for unity (Jn 17), as *“gift, commitment and achievement”*. Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement and Jesús Morán, co-president spoke about this approach in the light of Chiara Lubich's charism.

Card. Lorenzo Baldisseri's awaited talk will be about the orientation towards “A synodal Church” through the thought and witness of Pope Francis.

The geographic and cultural diversity of those present and the richness of the testimonies shared by the Bishops are a stimulating factor, which enhances both workshops and dialogue in plenary sessions, that focus on two points: how to incite fellowship, together and at the service of the people of God, and how to live positively conflicts that accompany each journey towards unity.

In the spirit of a Church that “goes forth”, the Conference welcomes also testimonies and concrete stories of lay people involved in building bridges in a fragmented world, on the paths of ecumenism, of interreligious dialogue, with people of no religious beliefs and in the multifaceted dialogue with culture.

The closing session of this conference will focus on the figure of the bishop as an instrument of mercy and unity in “the school of Mary”.

The meetings for Bishop-friends of the Focolare Movement began in 1977 on the initiative of Msgr. Klaus Hemmerle, Bishop of Aachen (Germany). Presently, the moderator of these conferences is Cardinal Kovithavanij Francis X., Archbishop of Bangkok (Thailand).

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¹ *Countries of origin:* Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bénin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Democratic Rep. of Congo, Tanzania, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Venezuela, Panama, U.S.A., Uruguay, Austria, Spain, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Czech Rep., Latvia, the Rep. of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Hungary.