

Dossier - January, 2015

CHIARA LUBICH

Foundress of the Focolare Movement

(1920-2008)

Biographical Timeline

1920, 22 January – Born in Trent, Italy. Baptized with the name of Silvia. Her parents are typesetters: her mother is a fervent Christian, her father a Socialist. Her brother, Gino, will be a partisan and then a reporter for the Italian Communist newspaper L'Unità.

1938 – Teaches in Castello and in Livo in Val di Sole, and then in Trent. Enrolls at the University of Venice where she begins to study Philosophy. The Second World War prevents her from continuing her studies.

1939 – While attending a course for Catholic Action youths, she visits the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto and discovers her vocation, a “fourth way”, a new vocation in the Church.

1943 – Called upon to animate a Franciscan Third Order group, she is attracted by Clare of Assisi’s radical choice of God and takes her name.

1943, 7 December – Consecrates her life to God with a perpetual vow of chastity. This day is considered the birth of the Focolare Movement.

1944, 13 May – Trent undergoes a violent bombing. Chiara’s family home is partially damaged and the family has to flee the city. Chiara stays behind in the city to continue supporting what was being born around her. Later she will find an apartment in Piazza Cappuccini, which she will share with her first companions. It is the first “focolare”.

1947 – First diocesan approval of the Movement by Carlo De Ferrari, Archbishop of Trent, who had stated: “The finger of God is in this”.

1948 – First men’s focolare is opened in Trent. In Montecitorio, Rome, Chiara meets the Honorable Iginio Giordani, father of four children, Member of Parliament, writer, journalist, and pioneer of ecumenism. Chiara will consider him a co-founder of the Movement because of his definitive contribution in the field of incarnating the spirituality unity in society and in the ecumenical developments of the Movement.

1949-1959 – Beginning in 1949, Chiara will spend her summers in the Trentino Dolomites with her first companions. They will be joined by a growing number of people, giving a picture of society founded on the Gospel. This is the first city of Mary, the Mariapolis. In 1959 more than 10,000 persons will gather in Fiera di Primiero, from 27 countries.

1953 – The way is officially opened for the “married focolarini” who are consecrated to God according to their state in life, being allowed to enter and belong to focolares.

1954 – Chiara founds the Diocesan Priests Branch and also that of Consecrated Religious who belong to the Movement. Pasquale Foresi is the first focolarino to be ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Trent. Chiara will also consider Foresi as a co-founder of the Movement because of his role in developing the Movement: for instance, in furthering theological studies, in drawing up the statutes, in setting up the first publishing house, and in establishing Loppiano, the first of the Movement’s little towns.

1956 – The first Citta Nuova magazine is published. The Volunteers are born, persons committed to renewing the most diverse areas of society.

1959 – The first collections of Chiara’s spiritual writings is published, with the title: *Meditazioni*. Thus beginning her publishing activity l’Editrice Città Nuova (New City Publishing). The Focolare begins its spreading beyond the Iron Curtain, in Eastern Europe.

1961 – In Darmstadt, Germany, Chiara meets with Lutheran pastors who wish to know about her Gospel spirituality. This is the beginning of ecumenism in the Movement.

1962 – First pontifical approval ad experimentum: John XXIII recognizes the Movement, under the name Work of Mary.

1963 – Near Rome, in Rocca di Papa, the first “Mariapolis Centre” is inaugurated with the purpose of offering formation courses for members of the Movement.

1964 – The first Focolare town is begun at Loppiano, in Incisa Val d’Arno, near near Florence.

1966 – She founds the Gen Movement (New Generation), youth branch of the Focolare. At London Chiara is received in audience by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Doctor Michael Ramsey, Primate of the Anglican Communion, who encourages the spreading of the spirituality of the Focolare in the Church of England. In Fontem (The Republic of Cameroon), she lays the foundation stone of a hospital offering assistance to the Bangwa Tribe, in one of the Focolare’s little towns, which bears witness to the collaboration between the local population and the Focolare. Chiara founds the Parish Movement in response to encouragement from Paul VI to bring the spirit of unity into parishes and into diocese.

1968 - She founds the Gens Branch for Gen seminarians. Chiara Lubich realizes that the social realizations in the fields of society share a vital interconnectedness and she forms them into one movement to which she gives the name, “New Humanity” and she entrusts it to the men and women Volunteers to animate it.

1967 – At Istanbul Chiara meets the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I. This will be the first of 24 audiences. She founds the New Families Movement.

1970 – Chiara founds the Gen 3 Movement for boys and girls, the Focolare’s third generation.

1971 – She begins the movement for religious adherents of the Focolare Movement. During an audience, Pope Paul VI gives his blessing.

1975 – For the Holy Year, 25 thousand youths gather for the Genfest in Rome, Italy.

1976 – The first international annual meeting of “Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement” is inaugurated. These are promoted by Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Bishop of Aachen, Germany, with the goal of providing an opportunity to enter more deeply into the spirituality of unity and experience “effective and affective” collegiality. Bishop Hemmerle will come to be considered a co-founder of the Movement.

1977 – At Guildhall in London, Chiara receives the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, in the presence of representatives from many faiths. This marks the beginning of the Movement’s dialogue with the faithful of other religions.

1980 – At Flaminio Stadium in Rome, 40 thousand youths gather for their Genfest. It is the Movement’s largest public gathering ever.

1981 – At Tokyo, Japan, invited by the Reverend Nikkyo Niwano, founder of the Buddhist lay movement, Rissho Kosei-kai, she speaks about her Christian experience in their great temple to 10 thousand people. This is the beginning of a fruitful relationship of dialogue and collaboration in the field of humanitarian action in favour of peace.

1982 – First international meeting of “Bishops Friends of the Focolare Movement” with bishops from different Churches and ecclesial communities, at the request of John Paul II.

1983 – First international congress of the New Humanity Movement at the Palaeur Sport Stadium in Rome, Italy, with more than 15 thousand people in attendance from five continents.

1984 – Chiara founds the Gen 4 Movement for young children. John Paul II visits the international Centre of the Movement in Rocca di Papa, Italy. And she gives the go-ahead to the Young for Unity Movement.

1985 – Chiara is named a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Joins the extraordinary synod for the twentieth anniversary of Vatican II. Genfest 1985 in Rome, Italy, marks the beginning of the Youth for a United World Movement, with the Gen as its main animators.

1988 – She is awarded the prize for the Pax Augustana by the city of Augsburg, Germany.

1990 – The Pontifical Council for the Laity approves the updated General Statutes of the Focolare Movement. With the help of Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Chiara inaugurates the Abba School (center for interdisciplinary studies), whose task is to explore the doctrinal dimensions of the charism of unity.

1991 – In Brazil, at Mariapolis Araceli, near to San Paulo, Chiara begins the Economy of Communion project.

1993 – Through simultaneous broadcasts to 63 national t.v. stations and many local ones, the Familyfest, which is held at the Palaeur Sport Stadium in Rome, is viewed by some 500 million spectators around the world.

1994 – She is named honorary president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

1996 – With a group of politicians, adherents of the Focolare, she starts the Political Movement for Unity. She receives an honorary doctorate in Social Sciences from the University of Lublino, in Poland. Another eleven honorary doctorates will follow: Theology (Philippines and Taiwan, 1997, Slovakia, 2003, England, 2008); Social Communications (Thailand, 1997); Human Sciences (USA, 1997); Philosophy (Mexico, 1997); Interdisciplinary Studies (Argentina, 1998); Religious Sciences (Brazil, 1998); Economy (Brazil, 1998 and Italy, 1999); Psychology (Malta, 1999); Pedagogy (USA, 2000). In Paris, she is awarded the Unesco Prize for Education and Peace.

1997 – At Bangkok, Thailand, she meets the Supreme Patriarch of Thai Buddhism, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, who encourages the dialogue and cooperation between Buddhists and the Movement. At Chiang Mai, Thailand, she speaks to a large group of Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay people, sharing her spiritual experience with them. In Manila, Philippines, she presents the Focolare Movement to the General Assembly of the Bishop's Philippine Bishops Conference. Following this, she will also speak at the Bishop Conferences of Taiwan, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, Poland, India, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Austria. At the United Nations Building in New York City, she speaks about the Unity of Peoples, during a symposium organized in her honour by the WCRP. She offers her testimony to three thousand Black American Muslims of the American Muslim Society in the Malcolm X Mosque, in Harlem, New York. She has been invited by the Imam W. D. Mohammed, who is its founder. At Graz, in Austria, she proposes the spirituality of unity as an "ecumenical spirituality" at the opening of the second European ecumenical assembly promoted by the Council of European Bishops Conferences (CCEE) and by the Council of the Christian Churches of Europe (KEK) which groups together Orthodox Churches and Churches of the Reform.

1998 – She meets the Jewish community in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. The President of Brazil confers on her "The Cruziero do Sul" (Southern Cross) for her efforts on behalf of the most disadvantaged and for promoting the Economy of Communion. In Rome, at Saint Peter's Square, before more than 350,000 participants, she is one of four founders who speak at the first international meeting Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. Pope John Paul II entrusts to her the development of a path to communion among the Movements. In Strasbourg, France, she receives the 1998 Human Rights Prize from the Council of Europe. In Bern, Switzerland, she makes a presentation as part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Swiss Constitution.

1999 – In Strasbourg, France, she speaks to the Conference for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Council of Europe. In her address, "A Market-based Society, Democracy, and Solidarity," she presents the experience of the Economy of Communion as the basis of a new way of conducting business. At Spyer, Germany, she brings a message of encouragement from Pope John Paul II to a meeting of the founders and leaders of 41 Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, organized by the Community of Saint Egidio and the Renewal in the Holy Spirit. In Augsburg, Germany, she joins in the ceremony of signing the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and meets with the highest authorities of the worldwide Lutheran Federation.

2000 – She receives honorary citizenships from Rome and from Florence. In recent years, she had received another seventeen such honours, including those from Palermo, Genoa, Turin, Milan, and Buenos Aires. She receives the Great Cross of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany. At Rothenburg, Germany, she meets with representatives of fifty Evangelical Lutheran Movements. In Washington D. C., she speaks to a gathering of more than 5,000 people, including Christians and members of the American Muslim Society. A fraternal dialogue begins in many different cities across the United States. In Rome, at the Italian parliament's Palazzo San Macuto, she presents to a large crowd of politicians the ideals of the Movement for Unity in Politics. At Assisi, she advocates a journey toward communion among old and new charisms, beginning with the different branches of the Franciscan family.

2001 – In Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, she receives the Defender of Peace Prize from two Gandhian organisations, the Shanti Ashram and the Sarvodaya Movement. She also shares the story of her spiritual journey at the Somaya University, Mumbai. In Prague, the Czech Republic, she meets with President Vaclav Havel. At

Bratislava, in Slovakia, during a gathering of the National Parliament, she presents “A Politics of Communion” to 150 deputies and local mayors. At Innsbruck, Austria, she participates at the Convention, “1000 Cities for Europe.” She is invited to speak on fraternity as a political concept.

2002 – At Castel Gandolfo, Italy, she supports the first symposium on interreligious dialogue among members of the Abba School and authoritative scholars and professors of Hinduism. In Geneva, Switzerland, invited by the President of the Protestant Church of Geneva, she speaks about ecumenism in Saint Peter’s Cathedral during Sunday Service. At the Ecumenical Council of Churches, she proposes the “spirituality of communion” as an “ecumenical spirituality”. In Montserrat, she speaks of her life experience to 400 nuns and sisters. In Madrid, she offers her political message in the local seat of the European Parliament, speaking before a hall filled with politicians and administrators.

2003 -In Mumbai, she deepens the dialogue with Hinduism that began during her first visit to India in 2001. She speaks at the Somaya College, and Indian institute of higher learning dedicated principally to interreligious dialogue; at Bharatiya Didya Bhavan, a centre founded to rediscover the cultural roots of Hinduism; and with the Swadhyaya Family, a Movement of more than 8 million adherents spread throughout India. Invited by Cardinal Dias, in Mumbai she also presents the spirituality of unity to priests, members of religious congregations, and lay movements. At the request of Archbishop Conceçao, she repeats the presentation in Delhi. Responding to Pope John Paul II’s request that the Focolare Movement take responsibility for promoting the year dedicated to the Rosary for the peace of the world, she promotes an International Marian Congress at Castel Gandolfo. Based on that event, 157 other Congresses, local as well as national, will follow on all five continents, at both local and national levels.

2004 – The president of the Republic of Italy presents her with the insignia of a “Cavaliere di Gran Croce” (Knight of the Great Cross). A daylong celebration, “Together for Europe,” is held in Stuttgart, Germany, to mark the widening of the European Union to 25 nations. It emerged from the developing communion among more than 150 movements and communities from various Churches, including Lutheran, Anglican, and Free Churches. Many political figures join the 9,000 participants, as well as another 100,000 who follow the event via live satellite transmission at 163 meetings taking place at the same time in other European cities.

2007 – On 7 December Sophia University Institute is erected by Pontifical Decree, based in the Focolare town of Loppiano. It is born as a further development of the Abba School. This is the last official act signed by Chiara Lubich.

2008, 14 March -Following a long illness, after having been visited in hospital by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholemew I, and receiving a comforting personal letter from Benedict XVI, after having been visited at her bedside by hundreds of people Chiara dies at her home in Rocca di Papa, Italy.