



**LOPPIANO**

CENTRO INTERNAZIONALE

*Movimento dei Focolari*

## The International Center of Loppiano

**Loppiano is the first international Focolare town**, situated on 260 hectares (642 acres) of land on a plateau which extends to the west of the town of Incisa in Val d'Arno, 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Florence.

- **The history**

**In the '50s, a first but already large group of people attracted by the spirituality of the Focolare Movement**, had begun to gather on the Dolomite mountains in northern Italy during the summer. Chiara Lubich, the founder, relates, "It was a coexistence of people of every social category, of all ages, of both sexes, of more various vocations, which constituted almost a temporary town characterized by the practice of the new commandment of Jesus 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Admiring the green valley from a hill, I understood that one day the Lord would want a similar town somewhere like the one that was taking place, but a permanent one."

In **1964** Loppiano was born, the first of 33 Focolare towns that would be born around the world with the desire to live permanently, the continuous novelty proposed by the Gospel: universal brotherhood.

- **Today**

Loppiano currently has about **850 inhabitants**: men and women, families, youth and children, priests and religious, of 65 countries from five continents. More than half of the inhabitants live there permanently while others attend one of the 12 international schools where they stay from 6 to 18 months. The international and multicultural component makes Loppiano a "laboratory town" with over forty years of experience where one goes through a daily experience of living together harmoniously side-by-side, in communication and collaboration with people of different ages, social status, traditions, cultures and religions. From 1964 until today Loppiano has intensified and established relationships with institutions, companies and other cities in the surrounding area of Valdarno, creating a fruitful collaboration on all fronts: civil, economic and cultural. In 2000, Chiara Lubich received an honorary citizenship from the town of Incisa in Valdarno and on that occasion the Mayor recognized in Loppiano an important asset for the municipality and the territory. There are various Focolare communities in the Valdarno area with a widespread presence of members who seek to bring a taste of universal brotherhood wherever he or she lives, studies and works.

Every year, the town welcomes **thousands of visitors** and it is a meeting place for peoples of various cultures and religions, illustrating a coexistence that also speaks to larger multicultural cities of the Third Millennium. Over the years various economic activities have been established in Loppiano. In fact, the economy of the town depends



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on these activities of work; an economy taking into account the needs of all and invites everyone to provide professional and personal skills, in a full communion of material and spiritual goods.

**In 2004** the church named Maria Theotokos was inaugurated. It is now a shrine which also houses an ecumenical chapel for different Christian denominations. The adjacent multi-purpose complex, equipped with halls for conferences, multimedia and musical events started functioning since the beginning of 2007.

The **Lionello Bonfanti Industrial Park** opened near the town of Loppiano in 2006. It is currently home to some twenty companies that operate according to the principles of the Economy of Communion. The industrial park is meant to represent the main coordination point and place of exchange of ideas and plans for the more than 200 companies in Italy (and 700 in the world) that adhere to the Economy of Communion project. The model catalyst is that of combining communion and market, involving the basic structure of the modern economy, the enterprise, and encouraging the sharing of profits in favor of those who inhabit the peripheries of the planet.

So far there are 7 industrial parks of the Economy of Communion in the world, in various stages of implementation. The Italian industrial park was named after Lionello Bonfanti, a judge who was among the first builders of the town of Loppiano.

The latest achievement in Loppiano is **Sophia University Institute (IUS)** that started in 2008. The new academic center offers students a **Master's degree for two years in 'Basics and Perspectives of a Culture of Unity'** and the corresponding doctoral program.

Promoted by the Work of Mary of the Focolare Movement, the Institute was established by the Holy See with the Decree of the Congregation for Catholic Education of December 7, 2007. The Institute promotes cooperation with other academic centers, identifying new courses of formation and horizons of research to be pursued. Together they collaborate with the cultural and social realities that, in different forms, express the human drive towards dialogue, communion in freedom, solidarity, development and defense of the rights of individuals and peoples.

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