

DOSSIER - March 2017

The New Families of the Focolare Movement celebrates its 50th anniversary

Significant dates and events

Rocca di Papa (Rome), July 9, 1967. Chiara Lubich founds the *New Families Movement*, a branch of the Focolare Movement. She entrusts them with the families of the world and asks them to accompany engaged couples and see to their formation. She speaks of a priority: «God has entrusted to us a particular face, that of Jesus crucified and forsaken. Thus, even when we deal with families we must give preference to those in whom we encounter His face. We have to love in a very particular way families threatened by separation, by divorce, split up families that need to be reunited».

November 1973. The New Families International Centre is set up and gradually the local centres start to take shape. More formation activities are provided for families in diverse situations and stages of life, while particular attention is given to widows, separated couples and persons facing difficult situations. Constructive support and sharing are offered through on-going formation given to groups of families in different parts of the world.

May 1976. Marriage preparation courses for engaged couples are started both on an international and local level.

In 1979, the project 'Adoption at a distance' is launched. This is meant to support children that have no family or are in dire need of help. Although not a very common practice at the time, it arouses interest in Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa.

May 3, 1981. The Familyfest, the first international public event of the New Families Movement is held at the Paleur, Rome. In her opening address, Chiara Lubich speaks about "Family and love" to the 24,000 participants from 49 countries. Pope John Paul II addresses the gathering in the afternoon.

In 1982 the "Loreto School" is established in Loppiano. Residential courses for complete nuclear families go deeper into themes related to all aspects of family life in the light of the spirituality of unity. Here, families coming from different countries and cultures have the opportunity to live an experience of brotherhood.

April 8-9, 1989. The Congress entitled "Family-society, rooted in the Absolute for today's humanity" takes place at Castelgandolfo, Rome. Chiara Lubich's opening speech is followed by experiences that witness commitment in various fields and prove that the family is a fundamental resource for society.

June 5, 1993. The Familyfest is held once more at the Paleur in Rome. 14,000 people from 70 countries take part in the Paleur event, together with others who participate in the 6 congresses held in Melbourne, Hong Kong, Yaoundé, San Paolo, Buenos Aires and New York, that are directly linked to Rome and between themselves. It is calculated that hundreds of millions of people watched the direct RAI transmission of the Familyfest made available to another 200 TV stations worldwide. In her message, Chiara Lubich describes the family as "seed of communion for the humanity of the third millennium", and augurs that "the values ingrained in the family - gratuitousness, spirit of service, reciprocity - are conveyed to the whole human family". This event has been one of the most significant preparations for the 1994 International Year of the Family and the UN officially recognizes New Families Movement as "Patron of the Family International Year".

In 1998, AFNOnlus (Azione per Famiglie Nuove Onlus) is set up. The legal recognition of this association promotes further initiatives and projects. Presently, there are about 100, supported by 10,714 people that cater for 11,643 minors in 53 countries. AFN has been involved in the adoption service since 2001, and since 2005 it has been recognized by the Italian law as an International Adoption Agency collaborating with 6 other countries. During these years, 800 families adopted 1070 children.

The FamilyFest 2005 is broadcast live from Piazza di Campidoglio, the square in front of the Italian Parliament in Rome. Held in collaboration with 7 other world capital cities, that are directly linked to Rome, this FamilyFest is a tribute to John Paul II who has recently passed away. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, at the

time President of the Italian Republic, defines the event as “a new project of a culture that enhances the role of the family as a resource for community”.

In November 2015, “Up2Me” is launched, a project which aims at the affective and sexual formation of youth (9-17 years) and their holistic harmonious maturity. Parents are involved during certain moments of this educational programme.

January 2016. The project “Let’s house together”, launched in Italy in collaboration with other realities of the Focolare Movement, aims at strategies for a real welcome to minor unaccompanied migrants, neo-adult asylum seekers and emarginalized young Italians, by setting up professional courses and internships and encouraging the support of a network of families and companies.

Presently there are about 800,000 people worldwide involved in the New Families Movement.