

## Russia

### Brief overview of the Focolare's history

#### The beginnings

Back in the 1970's the focolarini who lived in the German Democratic Republic made the first contacts with people in what was then the Soviet Union. In 1986 the Hungarian Fialowsky family, members of the Movement in Budapest, moved to Dubna, a city about 130 km from Moscow, for work. Some families and young people were attracted by their way of life and wanted to share it.

In 1989 the first men's focolare was set up in Russia's capital and the women's focolare followed in 1991. At the time the local Focolare community was made up of about 40 people. In April 1992 the Movement's first public meeting was held; there were 220 participants.

In June 1991 in Czestochowa (Poland), Chiara Lubich had her first meeting with the Movement's Eastern European members. This was a milestone for Russia's Focolare community who crossed their borders for the first time to meet Chiara and their fellow Focolare members from Eastern Europe.

#### Chelyabinsk- a city just east of the Ural Mountains

In September 1992 some focolarini men set out from Moscow to make their first visit to Chelyabinsk- a city beyond the Urals, 1900 km from Moscow and, up until a short while previously, closed off to foreigners. Bit by bit a Focolare community developed there and in 1995 the first Mariapolis was held. Communities were later born in Novosibirsk and Omsk.

#### A focolare house in Siberia

In 2001 a women's focolare opened in Krasnoyarsk for the Siberian region. The first contacts were made with people who had been receiving the Word of Life for some time already. The Spirituality was welcomed by people in various cities throughout Siberia.

The first Siberian Mariapolis took place in 2004 at Divnogorsk, a city near Krasnoyarsk. Participants arrived from different cities, some undertaking a 2000 km trip. There were 90 people present from various nationalities and churches.

#### Ecumenism

In the early 90's, amidst the Russian Society's identity search, consequent to the fall of the Soviet Regime, the Focolare's work, and particularly its relationship with the Orthodox Church, was always appreciated. Official representatives of the Patriarch of Moscow often participated in the Movement's activities.

The Focolare's co-president, Giancarlo Faletti participated at the enthronement of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill in February 2009. His participation was deeply important for the

local community and subsequently there was an increased interest from members of Russian Orthodox associations in the “Together for Europe” project, in which they partake since 2004.

## **At the Enthronement of Patriarch Kirill**

**Giancarlo Faletti represented the Focolare Movement worldwide.**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009 Giancarlo Faletti, co-president of the Focolare Movement, represented Maria Voce and the Focolare worldwide at the enthronement ceremony for Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. The ceremony took place at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Afterwards, the Patriarch Kirill invited the Focolare’s co-president to the official luncheon. Mr. Faletti was received and greeted personally by His Holiness who thanked him with warmth and joy. Giancarlo Faletti conveyed the greetings, prayers and spiritual accompaniment of Maria Voce and the entire Focolare Movement around the world, especially the predominantly Orthodox Focolare Community of young people, families and adults in Moscow. The enthronement was a moment of deep communion with them.

## **Nina Vyazovetskaya’s experience**

**A member of the Russian Orthodox Church**

**Told during Chiara Lubich’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary  
Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome - 18<sup>th</sup> April 2008**

**I come from Moscow and am a member of the Russian Orthodox Church.** I am a doctor and I worked for two years as an internist in Moscow’s hospital. I grew up in a family that, like most others in Moscow, has no religious conviction.

**In 1990 I was baptised almost “by chance”:** communism had crumbled and, in that period of great change, everyone was looking for something new. But from that day on I didn’t go back to church.

When I met Chiara and the Focolare Movement it was a turning point for me: I had encountered God and my life changed. I wanted to get to know God and Christian faith. When I asked the focolarine women (who are Catholic) for help they brought me to my Orthodox Church. I started to discover the beauty and richness of the Church, of Christian life and of living for God. And now I have chosen to follow God on Chiara’s path, the focolare.

**Many Russians decided to get baptised or to return to the sacraments after having met the Focolare Movement.** I can now say that I am Orthodox thanks to Chiara. Chiara helps me to appreciate and be faithful to my religious practices (such as fasting, prayer) and to the teachings of my church. Thank you Chiara!