

## MARIA VOCE

### President of the Focolare Movement

#### *Brief biography*

**Maria Voce was elected president of the Movement on 7 July 2008 by the General Assembly of the Focolare.** She is the first focolarina to succeed the founder, Chiara Lubich, who died on the 14th of March of the same year.

She was born in Ajello Calabro, Cosenza, Italy, on 16 July 1937, the first of seven children. Her father was a doctor; her mother a housewife.

During her last year of law school in Rome (1959) she met a group of focolarini at the university and was fascinated by their Gospel witness. Upon completion of her studies, she became the first woman lawyer in her city's court system. Later she studied Theology and Canon Law.

**In 1963, she felt the unexpected and “overwhelming” call of God to follow in the way of Chiara Lubich** and she immediately responded. She gave up her promising career and went to attend the school of formation for focolarine in Grottaferrata, Rome. Chiara gave her the name *Emmaus*, and this is how she continues to be known in the Movement. This name recalls the story of the two disciples who walked with Jesus following his Resurrection, and it recalls what is at the heart of the Focolare's charism: Jesus makes himself present “where two or more are united” in His name.

From 1964 to 1972 she was in Sicily, in the Focolare Centres of Syracuse and Catania. From 1972 to 1978 she belonged to Chiara Lubich's personal secretariat and, in for the following ten years she lived in the Focolare Centre of Istanbul where she established ecumenical and interreligious relationships, especially with the then Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrius I, and with numerous metropolitans including the now Patriarch Bartholemew I, as well as with representatives of various Churches.

As a law expert, from 1995 she was a member of the Abba School, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies chaired by Chiara Lubich. And from 2000 she was also co-responsible for the international commission, “Communion and Law,” a network of academics and professionals involved in law.

From 2002 until their approval, which came in 2007, she worked directly with Chiara Lubich in updating the General Statutes of the Movement.

**On 7 July 2008 she was elected president of the Focolare Movement** and she began by revealing her presidential style would be to remain committed to “giving priority to relationships” and continuing to strive with all her strength towards the goal for which the Movement was born: to seek unity at all levels, in every field, pursuing the various paths of dialogue that were opened by Chiara Lubich.

On July 27, 2008, at the conclusion of the General Assembly, **Maria Voce was received by Pope Benedict XVI** at his residence in Castel Gandolfo, together with the Co-President Giancarlo Faletti and an international representation of the Movement. On April 23, 2010 Pope Benedict XVI received her in a private audience. The pope spoke of the “charism that builds bridges, that makes unity” and recommended that the Movement continue in implementing the charism with renewed commitment through an ever deeper love and striving for holiness.

In October 2008 she participated and spoke at the Synod of Bishops on “The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church.”

On 24 November 2009 Benedict XVI appointed her as a **Consultor for the Pontifical Council for the Laity**.

She has made several trips to meet communities of the Movement around the world and to continue contacts with people in civil and ecclesiastical environments, in cultural and political environments, and in ecumenical and interreligious environments. These important steps strengthen the ties of friendship and cooperation constructed during almost 70 years of the Focolare’s life and they bring newer developments on the path to brotherhood.