

Foundress of Focolare Movement Dies in Rome

by Susan Brinkmann, OCDS

Staff Writer

(March 14, 2008) The 88 year old foundress of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, passed away in her home in Rocca di Papa (Rome) in the early morning hours of March 14 from a severe respiratory ailment.

According to various news sources, Lubich had been hospitalized for a month at Gemelli Polyclinic but asked to be returned to her home. At the time of her death, she was surrounded by her first companions in the world-wide ecumenical Focolare Movement - Dori Zamboni, Aletta Salizzoni, Silvana Veronesi, Graziella De Luca, Gis Calliari and Bruna Tomasi.

“With deep emotion I learned the news of the pious death of Ms. Chiara Lubich, which came at the end of a long and fruitful life marked by her tireless love for the abandoned Jesus,” said Pope Benedict XVI in a telegram. “I thank the Lord for the witness of her life, spent in listening to the needs of modern man in complete faithfulness to the Church and to the Pope.”

The Focolare Movement was founded by Lubich and some of her friends in Trent, Italy in 1943. It began as an effort to live the Gospel more deeply which they did by choosing a passage from Scripture each month to use as a guide for the daily living. Lubich's commentary on the "Word of Life," as these selected passages are now called, is now translated into 84 languages and reaches more than 15 million people throughout the world.

“What bound the group together was their faith and their experience that God is love,” said a statement on the group’s website. “That experience radically changed their lives. They resolved to live as persons whose actions and thoughts would be based on the Gospel. The consequences were many. One was that this life spread and soon a community of 500 people of all ages had come to life around them. The group around Chiara was often referred to as the ‘focolare,’ the Italian term for the hearth or family fireside.”

The Focolare Movement now has more than 87,000 members worldwide with another two million friends and adherents in over 180 countries. Core members live in “mini-cities” or communities throughout the world. Over 100 meetings called "Mariapolises" are held at these “mini-cities” every summer.

The first permanent Mariapolis was established at Loppiano, Italy in 1964 and now has about 500 inhabitants. In North America, the Mariapolis is located at Hyde Park, New York and named "Mariapolis Luminosa".

The Holy Father surely summed up the sentiments of all who knew and loved her when he said, “I hope that those who knew and met her, admiring the wonders that God achieved through her missionary ardour, may follow her footsteps and keep her charism alive.”

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