

Dear Friends,

At 2 am on the 14th of March Chiara Lubich, who founded the Focolare Movement, departed this earthly life for the closer presence of God. My wife Ann and I have been part of the Focolare Movement for over 30 years and have met regularly with others to share what is called 'The Word of Life'.

I want to tell you some of the wonderful story of the Focolare Movement and of its founder who is truly a saint of God. Jesus Christ still speaks to men and women today and calls them, if only they would listen, to serve Him and proclaim His message of salvation to the world.

The 7th December 1943 is regarded as the date on which the Movement was born: for it was on that day that Chiara who lived in Trent, Italy, consecrated herself to God before a local Franciscan priest. She wrote in her diary about that day: 'The interior joy was inexplicable, secret, but contagious.' Some days earlier Chiara had felt very strongly that God was calling her to give herself completely to Him.

Within a short time other young women, seeing the light in Chiara, wanted to join her and follow it. Eventually this came to pass and their only 'rule' was to follow the Gospel in everything they did. One day in May 1944, on opening the Gospels at random they read the prayer of Our Blessed Lord to His Father before His Passion, in which He prayed for His followers 'that they may all be one' (Jn 17:21) These words moved them greatly, and in the Christmass of 1946, they chose as their motto 'Either unity or death.'

The other foundation stone of the young Movement are the words 'Jesus Forsaken'. One day a priest, who had given Communion to one of their sick members, asked the group when did they think Jesus had suffered most. After they had said what they thought 'When He was in the Garden of Olives.' The priest said 'no, when He had cried from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

This reply made a deep impression on Chiara, and from that moment 'Jesus forsaken' became the spouse of her soul for the rest of her life. The Movement agreed 'to follow Jesus Forsaken.'

Chiara and her companions lived together in a small house in Trent. They lived the Gospel law of Love and were ready to give their lives for one another. They soon discovered the truth of Our Lord words (Mt. 18:20) 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'

This was during the war when there were frequent air raids on Trent so the group, with other people, spent many hours in the air raid shelters. They read together the Gospels, and inspired by them, helped the other people who were so impressed with their spiritual warmth that they nicknamed them Focolare, which in Italian means fireplace or hearth. The name stuck.

Although the Movement began in the Roman Catholic Church, it soon spread to the Lutherans, then to Anglicans, Orthodox, Copts and others. Archbishop Ramsey of Canterbury was a great supporter of the movement, and also the later Archbishops. In April 1977 Chiara Lubich was given the Templeton Prize by the Duke of Edinburgh for Progress in Religion.

The Focolare Movement is now a world wide ecumenical, interfaith movement and has brought many to the knowledge and service of Christ.

I had the honour, with other Anglican priests, of meeting Chiara in Rome when we celebrated there the 25th Anniversary of Anglican membership. I was very impressed with her, and was greatly moved by her address on Our Blessed Lady in which she reminded us in a very Anglican way, that Mary's life is the example for every Christian - 'Be it unto me according to Thy word'. Through the interpreter I told her how pleased I was with what she had said for I had learnt that at my Anglican Seminary in the West Indies.

As Traditional Anglicans, we rejoice in the ministry of women for we believe that men and women are equal and share in the Priesthood of all believers, but according to God's creation and plan men and women have different functions. Some men are called to be 'servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God' and minister to the Church as Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Bishops and Priests, especially at the altar, represent the male Jesus at the Last Supper, re-presenting before the Father and the world His death on Calvary. A woman cannot be a genuine Bishop or Priest at the altar, her roll and ministry is that of Blessed Mary who brought the Word of God into the world as

Jesus Christ, clothing Him with flesh in her virgin womb.

I rejoice in the ministry of Chiara Lubich.

The Focolare Magazine is called New City.

We were very sorry to hear of the death of two of our Traditional Anglican Bishops in India. Bishop Tuti and Bishop Chacko. We pray for their families and Dioceses.

May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Your Priest & Friend,

Fr. Brian.