

COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

Purpose: To promote reciprocity among movements and new ecclesial communities; to get to know one another better; to share in concrete projects; to discover and value the gift that each group possesses so that it may enrich the Church and society.

History: Ever since the beginning of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich became acquainted with important charismatic figures in the Church. These included Fr. Leone Veuthey with his “Crusaders’ Movement”; Fr. Patrick Peyton, founder of the “Family Rosary Crusade”; Fr. Pedro Richards of the “Christian Family Movement”; Fr. Werenfried van Straaten, founder of “Aid to the Church in Need”; the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal; Fr. Virginio Rotondi’s “Oasis Movement”; and Fr. Riccardo Lombardi’s “Movement for a Better World”.

On May 30, 1998, on the vigil of Pentecost, John Paul II called the movements and new ecclesial communities together in St. Peter’s Square in Rome to share their experiences. Each group has its own specific charism given to it by the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of our times. The Pope called them “significant expressions of the charismatic aspect of the Church”, “co-essential to its institutional aspect and in profound communion with it”. Among the founders present was Chiara Lubich, who, in her words to the Pope, promised to commit herself and the whole Focolare Movement to work at achieving full communion among the Catholic movements.

On the vigil of Pentecost 2006, it was Benedict XVI who invited the movements and new ecclesial communities to Rome once again. He too was convinced that these new ecclesial realities are a providential gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church today and a way to respond effectively to the challenges of our time. On Pentecost 2013, Pope Francis renewed his trust in the many members of ecclesial movements who had come to Rome, and directed them to go out toward the “existential peripheries” within the evangelical mission of the Church.

In 2014, during the third worldwide conference of movements sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Pope pointed out that they should reach ecclesial maturity, while conserving the freshness of each charism, respecting the freedom of individuals and yet continually seeking out communion with other movements.

The Focolare also promotes communion with the more traditional religious orders that are the fruits of earlier charisms in the church. Important milestones include the meeting Chiara had in Assisi, Italy, in 2000, with members of the widespread Franciscan family, and one in Monserrat, Spain, in 2002, with the Benedictine order. The meeting between ecclesial movements and religious orders in Assisi in 2010 was also significant.

Developments: Hundreds of meetings have been held throughout the world on the model of the event of Pentecost 1998. Members of more than 500 movements and new ecclesial communities have participated in them.

Inspired by the communion among Catholic movements, also movements and communities within other Christian churches have started to meet, giving rise to relationships of understanding and fraternity among all.

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