

## BIOGRAPHICAL FACT SHEET

### **Margaret Karram President of the Focolare Movement**

Margaret Karram was elected President of the Focolare Movement by the General Assembly in 2021; she is the third President after the foundress Chiara Lubich and Maria Voce who was elected for two consecutive terms. Margaret was born in Haifa, Israel, in 1962 into a Palestinian Catholic family. She learnt Christian values and principles as a child and these have imprinted in her formation a strong openness towards her neighbour, beyond all religions and cultures. She attended a Catholic school with the Carmelite nuns in Haifa, where, in addition to studying Arabic and Hebrew, she began studying English and Italian. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience, but also a life of great suffering that gave rise to the desire in her to act so as to change society and the world around her, even as a teenager.

At the age of fourteen, she encountered the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, which she perceived as a response from God. She understood the great impact that living the words of the Gospel could have, moment by moment and in every circumstance, aware of the power of a revolution generated by real, disinterested and measureless love. This is how her commitment to dialogue began between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, so that later she spent a period in the United States where she graduated in Judaism at the American Jewish University.

Returning to her homeland, she became co-responsible for the Focolare community in the Holy Land. She worked for 14 years at the Consulate General of Italy in Jerusalem. She also collaborated in various commissions and organisations for the promotion of dialogue between the three monotheistic religions, such as the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land and the organisation ICCI (Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel). In 2013, she was awarded the Mount Zion Award for reconciliation, given to her together with the scholar and researcher Yisca Harani, for their commitment to the development of dialogue between different cultures and religions.

In 2014, on Pentecost Sunday, she was invited to represent the Focolare Movement at the Invocation for Peace in the Vatican Gardens, together with Pope Francis and the then Presidents of the Israeli State, Shimon Peres, and the Palestinian State, Mahmūd Abbās. In the same year, she was elected as one of the councillors by the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement. In the following six-year period (2014-2020) she was councillor for Italy and Albania and co-responsible for the Focolare's dialogue between Ecclesial Movements and new Catholic Communities. In 2016, she was awarded the St. Rita International Prize for promoting dialogue between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, based on the everyday way of living.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2022, Margaret Karram and Co-President Jesús Morán, together with a delegation from the Focolare Movement, were received in audience by His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Istanbul (Turkey) at the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of

Constantinople, consolidating the long and fruitful friendship between the Focolare Movement and the Patriarchate.

In February of the same year, she took part in the European continental phase of the Synod of the Catholic Church in Prague (Czech Republic) and the following October, Pope Francis invited her to attend the first session of the Synod of the Catholic Church on Synodality at the Vatican as a "specially invited guest".

In March, in Munich, Germany, she spoke to the Steering Committee of Together for Europe (TfE), a network of about 300 Christian Movements that has been working for many years to spread a culture of fraternity between people, organisations, Christian Churches and people of different faiths throughout Europe.

At the same time, the Archdiocese of Milan (Italy) in collaboration with 'Elikya' the Social Promotion Association, awarded her the 2023 "Fire within" prize, an initiative aimed at highlighting and publicly promoting the knowledge of exemplary people who are a model to all men and women of goodwill.

In May, during a visit to the Focolare communities in several countries in Southeast Asia, Margaret Karram spoke in Tokyo (Japan) in the Great Sacred Hall of the Buddhist Movement Risho Kosei Kai, with which the Focolare have been friends since the time of their respective founders, Chiara Lubich and Nikkyo Niwano.

In Indonesia, at the Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University in Yogyakarta, she participated in the interfaith panel discussion "In dialogue to promote fraternity". She also went to the Fiji Islands, where two Focolare communities had recently been established, collaborating with the local Church throughout the Pacific area.

In August, at the World Youth Day in Lisbon (Portugal) she spoke in two catecheses on the relevance today of the figure and message of Mary and on building bridges in contexts of conflict.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Focolare Movement, Margaret Karram was received in a private audience by Pope Francis, together with Jesús Morán, and those responsible for the Movement's geographical areas around the world. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, she was appointed Member of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

In February 2024, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the historic Joint Declaration on Justification between the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches, she spoke in Augsburg (Germany) at "Dare to be One", the conference of the bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement, belonging to 30 Christian denominations.

In May 2024, she addressed the interreligious conference "One Human Family" promoted by the Focolare Movement in which around 600 people of different religious faiths took part, with the aim of deepening dialogue and collaboration for peace and fraternity between peoples.

Together with the journalist Monica Mondo, author of the book "Per non sfiorarci invano" (Not to pass each other in vain) (Francescane Edition), a book-interview has been produced, in which Margaret Karram retraces her experience in the Holy Land, reflecting on peace through the instrument of dialogue, understood as a way to fraternity between peoples.

This October she will participate once more as a "specially invited guest" at the second session of the Catholic Church's XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality.