

## FOCOLARE



# Mariapolis 2018

**Helen Copeland** reports on the GB Mariapolis held at Ampleforth College this year.

**How is it possible** to build a world in a village? To live a lifetime in a day? The closest you will probably get is at a Mariapolis.

With the title 'Beyond all borders', the annual gathering of the Focolare Movement was set a challenge to step out of each one's comfort zone. Seeing past different ages, traditions and cultures, the citizens of this 'temporary town' sought to build a piece of a united world in four days just after Easter.

Over 400 people met together at Ampleforth College from all over the UK, Europe and with representatives from all the other continents. A Mariapolis was also taking place at the same time in Australia, building unity 24 hours a day!

## Living the Gospel

Through talks, shared life experiences and workshops, participants were able to reflect on the power of living the Gospel and what affect that can have on the world around. A married couple – one Roman Catholic and the other Anglican – spoke of how they tried to put the words of the Gospels into practice in their family life, bringing light to difficult situations including family feuds, bereavement and illness. A local 'Word of Life' group shared how they had worked together to support a

person in her claim for asylum status through the courts. Young people gave a presentation of their work on social projects in Eastern Europe through 'HombreMundo' and how that had inspired them to continue with inter-faith initiatives in this country.

## City of Mary

Although the name 'Mariapolis' means 'city of Mary' – a term stemming from the movement's origins in 1940s Italy – the persona of Mary has often been seen as a point of conflict between Christian traditions. As New City readers will know, the whole Focolare Movement, this year is focussing on Mary as understood in the spirituality of unity. This year's Mariapolis was a chance to share new reflections on the mother of Jesus – the first disciple – as a point of connection between Christians. One talk was given by Canon John McLuckie, on the place of Mary in the Scottish Episcopalian tradition. Other meditations touched on 'living' Mary, offering fresh perspectives to all traditions.

It would be naïve to say that these thoughts reflected the experience of everyone present, but these 'distances' also offered chances for discussion, dialogue and sharing, in pursuit of mutual understanding.

One young woman, asked what she would take away





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from the Mariapolis said ‘For me and my husband a sense of deeper commitment to follow only the plan of God, and give birth to Jesus as Mary did, wherever we find ourselves and whoever we are with.’

### Living as a family

But of course the Mariapolis is not just about listening to talks. There were lots of chances to offer practical help, to take time for deeper conversations, and also to have a lot of fun! Outings included moorland walks, a cider orchard tour and the city of York.

A strong body of young people enhanced the Mariapolis experience for many, by sharing both their commitment to building a united world, and their considerable talents, as well as organising a fair one afternoon, to raise money for the upcoming Genfest in Manila.

The contribution of the older generations was also appreciated, including profound interviews with members of Focolare communities from around the world who had lived the spirituality for many years.

‘As a “first timer” and new to the experience of Mariapolis, I have been singly impressed with the friendliness, openness and genuine approach to Christianity. I will remember this and also the maturity and sincerity of the younger members – inspirational’ commented one participant.

### The Golden Rule

In just one day at the Mariapolis, you can make so many discoveries. A conversation, a simple act of love, a reflection or a game can all be a chance for God to speak and for humanity to draw closer together. Writing about living the Golden Rule – which is also the law of the Mariapolis – Chiara Lubich said ‘One day spent like this is worth a lifetime. At the end of the day we will no longer recognise ourselves. A joy we have never felt before will flood over us. A new power will fill us. God will be with us, because he is with those who love.’\* 

\* *Essential Writings* by Chiara Lubich. Published by New City (2007) page122.