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Focolare Pays Tribute to Imam Warith Deen Mohammed

The passing of an inspiring life lived for unity and interfaith dialogue

A great friend of Chiara Lubich and of the Focolare Movement she founded, Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, leader of the largest constituent of Muslims in America, will be greatly missed. He died on September 9 in his home in Markham, Illinois, at age 74.

Imam Mohammed worked tirelessly for peace, unity and reconciliation. After inheriting the Nation of Islam community in 1975 from his father, Elijah Muhammad, he worked to move its followers toward more mainstream Muslim practice, emphasizing the faith's racial tolerance and universality. He was also deeply committed to building bridges between African-American Muslims and immigrants from the Middle East and Asia. For his outstanding interfaith efforts, he was elected in 1999 as an international president in the U.S. for the World Council for Religions and Peace.

His profound relationship with Chiara Lubich and his openness to the Focolare spirituality of unity made history when, in May 1997, he invited her to speak to 3,000 followers at the historic Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in Harlem, New York.

Later that year, Imam Mohammed was honored with the Luminosa Award for Unity, a recognition given by the Focolare to persons or organizations who with their work and with their life have promoted unity and dialogue in the world.

The two would appear together and collaborate in the years that followed, and deep bonds between their two communities continue today.

"Such a powerful unity has by now been established that I think the whole world should see it!" he once said, inviting Chiara to return to the U.S. in 2000 for the "Faith Communities Together" event in Washington, D.C which attracted 7,000 participants.

When asked about her relationship with Imam Mohammed, she answered: "I feel at ease with him because it seems to me that the Lord has put him next to us, as he has put us next to him, perhaps for a plan of love of his, which we will be able to understand in as much as we go ahead in our communion and by working together."

Focolare will pay special tribute to Imam Mohammed in the next issue of its magazine *Living City*.

Photo:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/movimento-dei-focolari/2333179152/in/set-72157604117956391/
More photos available upon request.