

***An interview with Ivo Markovic,  
By Karin Kaufman Wall***

***Ivo Markovic on the role of interreligious dialogue in Bosnia***

Ivo Markovic, a Franciscan priest, heads Face to Face Interreligious Service, an independent, nongovernmental, non-partisan, non-profit, voluntary organization for the promotion of interreligious dialogue, cooperation and understanding in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Pontanima, a choir whose members include singers from Bosnia's major religions, is one Face to Face project. Face to Face is supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Province of Bosnian Franciscans, "Bosnia Argentina." MCC workers John and Karin Kaufman Wall serve with Face to Face. Here Karin conducts an interview with Markovic.

**Kaufman Wall:** What gives you vision for your work?

**Markovic:** Faith gives me vision. My work in interreligious dialogue is inspired by my experiences in the war. I saw how xenophobia, fear and distance can be dangerous and can produce hatred and violence among humans.

**Kaufman Wall:** How does Pontanima choir, with its Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Jewish members, promote interfaith relationships?

**Markovic:** Through the choir, we can improve the relationships of common people through the power of art, spirituality, music and cooperation. Through this choir, we wanted to show that we, in the Balkans, can live together. Not only live together, but sing the songs of our neighbors and interact together. In this way, we remove xenophobia and build understanding and participation in other cultures. Religions are often involved as instruments in war. Monotheistic religions demand that their religion is unique the only way to God, and because of that, they are often the cause of aggression and violence.

**Kaufman Wall:** What does that mean in a Christian worship setting?

**Markovic:** Pluralism is a term that has been misunderstood. It means living together while preserving our uniqueness, not blending into one. We enrich our own identity and stability through communication with others. In isolation, we can't enrich our identity, we lose it.

If we as Christians try to change others' identity, to convert them from one identity to another, we produce defense mechanisms and hatred against Jesus Christ and everyone/thing identified with Christ. In a pluralistic life we have the possibility to inform people about salvation through Jesus Christ. With grace, we hope people will find an approach to Jesus Christ. We can prepare the road on which God is coming. Only God has the power to convert people.

Our goal is that we can sing in worship with Christian, Islamic and Jewish communities. During worship services, we sing only the songs of that religion, the songs that can be integrated into worship. Those of us from that particular religion will participate in worship, and others will be there in respect, as guests who are with their friends in the most important part of their lives.

**Kaufman Wall:** What were some of the joys and difficulties in making the choir a reality?

**Markovic:** When we started this choir in 1996, some members couldn't easily accept singing the songs of their "enemies." But over time, singing together, they soon felt the advantages of life together, reconciliation, healing and forgiveness. The choir as a community has the same problems as any community, but our differences are constructive.

When we sang in Zagreb, Croatia, after the war, we sang Serbian Orthodox songs that could be integrated into the Catholic liturgy. These were the songs of their enemies. But instead of opposition, we found people were delighted with the idea and experienced the power of reconciliation.

We have also met with a great deal of opposition. My own life was threatened by a Catholic brother because he saw me singing an Islamic song with the choir in Sarajevo. Under the exclamation of this

song, thousands of people from my group (Croats) had been killed. During the war, songs that had been written as worship songs to praise God were distorted into military anthems to unite ethnic groups and turn them against each other. Many people were killed, tortured and terrorized by these sacred songs that were misused as instruments of war. By singing these songs, together with people of various ethnic groups, we restore the songs to their intended purpose: to praise God.

Markovic is featured in the 18-minute MCC video "The Balkans: Wounded and searching for peace," available for free loan from the MCC Europe Office, CP 52, CH-2720 Tramelan, Tel: +41 32 4875756, Email: [Simone\\_Dunlap@mail.mcc.org](mailto:Simone_Dunlap@mail.mcc.org)

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