

# *Letting the wellspring flow*



NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2006

# The grace of forgiveness

Every year on Easter Eve in a community liturgy, we celebrate that which is and remains God's miracle in our lives, the foundation of our life together: forgiveness. We express this forgiveness

through gestures of welcoming and forgiving one another, but really it is God who welcomes and forgives us, through one another. We choose to turn together towards the Source, the Wellspring, to remain there, at the foot of the cross, to let mercy flow through us to water our earth and all our relationships. There is no more powerful, more intense moment than this one, in which God is able to speak among us.

*"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

This request which Christ makes to his Father resonates, and will ever reverberate, in the silence until the end of time. His arms are forever open on the cross, reaching out in blessing to all the peoples of the earth, with the power of God's love. "*Forgive them...*" is the first of Jesus' seven last words on the cross, as if to say that forgiveness always comes first, that it is waiting for us, that it is offered to us freely, as long as we live. We don't have to deserve it or to beg for it. God's joy is in forgiving us; joy which depends only upon our acceptance of forgiveness. We cannot but celebrate this great gift given to us. Our liturgy is intended to express our faith in the only power which is capable of transforming the world – beginning with our hearts – it is the non-violent force of the Gospel, the power of loving one's enemies, of forgiveness, the power of the resurrection at work in our lives.

"God, in your grace, transform the world." We carry within us this prayer of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Porto Alegre because it speaks of the deep desire for life in its fullness which is within the heart of every human being, a desire for justice and peace, for solidarity and fellowship amongst all human beings; but a desire which comes up against so many obstacles in us and amongst us, between peoples in this big global village in which it is so difficult to learn to live together, such is our diversity. The mystery of the cross is planted at the heart of "communion and otherness".

This prayer calls for our total commitment, for we understand that this transformation must take place first of all through the widening of our own hearts, through our ability to be open to those who are different. It pushes us to go to meet the other person, even someone who may have hurt us, to dare to trust and to seek ways toward reconciliation. And hasn't this prayer already been answered in Christ's whole life, culminating in his death, his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit? All is accomplished, and all still remains to be done, for God does not take our place and do it for us, but rather has infinite respect for us and leaves us free. "God gives us everything and asks everything of us," as Mother Genevieve used to say. God invites us

to look to Jesus, to him who did not answer evil with evil, who did not strike back at those who did violence to him, and to let ourselves be carried along in his footsteps. He chose to love us to the very end. As Brother Roger said, "It's easy to say that we love someone. To forgive is to love in the extreme." To forgive is to go beyond what is "reasonable", to die to our own "rights" and be born to a greater love which leads us to give the gift of ourselves.

On the threshold of his Passion, Jesus got up from the table and began to wash the feet of his disciples. "*Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.*" This act symbolises Jesus' gift of his life, upon which he founded the community of disciples. He said to them, and says to us today, "Remain in my love." To remain... to receive him, to let him live in you, among you, to return to this Source, this Wellspring which is always open, always being offered. "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

This is the mystery of God, who calls us to show forth, together, something of that love, not because we know how to pray or how to love better than other people, but just as we are, with our gifts, our riches and our problems, our weaknesses. In the face of this call to love, to forgive "up to seventy times seven times", we feel quite helpless. We manage it so seldom, so poorly; we hurt others so easily and sometimes even without noticing it. But God is not stopped by our lack of love, our unfaithfulness, our mistakes, our refusals. God sees further and deeper, sees our hearts, being the One who has already placed the desire to love within them. God invites us not to stop in the shadows, and not to remember anything of the evil which we may have done, nor of the evil we have suffered. In loving, the essential thing is not to accomplish it, but to keep starting over and over, to accept our inability and our poverty, which turns us toward our Source, our Wellspring, Christ died and risen.

*«Father, forgive them;  
for they do not know  
what they are doing.»*

This liturgy on Easter Eve means for us an expression of our desire to let God carry out the work of reconciliation in us, to let God into the very heart of our difficulties, our blockages, even where we find it impossible to forgive. It does not take the place of the forgiveness which we have to live day after day, but in that moment of celebration God asks nothing of us but that we surrender ourselves, with all the contradictory feelings we may have within us. JOY rises up when we allow God to act, when we give way to the One who is in our midst and moves among us; this joy comes because by receiving and offering forgiveness we free up the elemental life force which is our deepest being, our Source, our Wellspring, the life of God within us.

*"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you...  
If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."*

*(John 13:15-17)*

\*\*\*\*\*

# Porto Alegre

*This joy of forgiving makes life together possible, and permits us to go to meet every other person and to celebrate the gift of communion in God. Sister Anne-Emmanuelle experienced this in a very special way at the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006:*

«How can one put into words a very deep experience of spiritual life? For that is what this Assembly of the WCC was for me, ‘a celebration of life, *a festa da vida*’, as General Secretary Samuel Kobia said. Yes – what a life force, a resurrection force, emanates from the Church universal, the body of Christ, as we experienced it there, gathered as a ‘fellowship of churches’! It was a fellowship which had room for differences to be expressed, and problems, and suffering, but always guided by the theme, ‘God, in your grace, transform the world’ – a prayer which is also a confession of faith. It united us as together we turned again and again toward God.

This experience was as confirming the grace which is our vocation (at Grandchamp) of prayer for unity and reconciliation. Our life in community and our receiving of guests give us practice in experiencing our differences in the light of communion, and open us to the world, both nearby and far away. Our vocation pushes us along this path, to be reconciled in depth with our past history, both personal and collective. It helps us to keep coming back to what is essential in human life. And, in a profound way, I encounter the other person who is suffering, who is struggling, who hopes and who loves! Porto Alegre will remain, for me, all the grace and richness of the encounters which can happen so quickly when one shares the same search for God.

How beautiful that is! And what hope there is in realising that everywhere in the Church there is the same struggle to make our world more human, a better place to live for everyone! There are no boundaries to suffering, nor to the life force either!

The process of decision-making by consensus inaugurated by this Assembly is an encouraging step, because now there are no winners or losers, but rather a desire to reach out together for the good of all, to listen to the Holy Spirit. It is an important turning point towards unity, for this new way of proceeding corresponds better to the mystery of the Body of Christ which is the Church, and will make it possible for us to go from knowing our differences towards a communion in Christ which is stronger than that which makes us different, or opposed to one another, or divided. Little by little, the Assembly is going beyond the fears of differences, of otherness and seeking out the ways to true communion which include respect for differences. It was stated clearly that being divided is a sin, and that visible unity is urgently required in order to respond to the challenges of the world: globalisation, the dangers of pollution and of proliferating nuclear weapons, the problem of clean drinking-water. It is a common seeking for a better witness to God in our world, to God’s active presence and transforming life force and the hope which it breathes into us! So, in the litanies of the

worship services, we confessed together the errors of the churches and the need to be forgiven and to forgive.

The need for spirituality was emphasised from the start by Samuel Kobia: ‘Spirituality contributes crucially to overcoming violence and building peace. I believe that prayer and contemplation together form the foremost discipline for overcoming violence. The joint exercise of that spiritual discipline is an ongoing challenge for our fellowship. We must make space for this exercise to inspire and shape our individual and joint actions... If we focus on our capacity to relate to each other, to creation and to God, we realize that our ethical challenges have a profoundly spiritual dimension and vice versa. We can no longer separate ethics and ecclesiology, the search for unity of the church and the unity of humankind. They are closely intertwined with each other. What aggravates our divisions and the inequality among us and what can contribute to healing and

reconciliation, has, indeed, a common centre... We will be best equipped to promote human relationships in the world around us if as churches we shall learn how to share with one another all the gifts of grace which we have received from God... Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are significant and imperative in the process towards overcoming violence, seeking peace and promoting reconciliation.’

At Porto Alegre I was deeply renewed in my being as a Christian, and I felt innerly recharged to carry on in the struggle for LIFE, breathed by the Spirit who is at work, transforming those who let themselves be taken over, who keep giving themselves up again and again to the Spirit’s actions, in simple everyday life, often hidden from our eyes, consisting in nothing very special, but where there flows forever a Wellspring which has a ‘thirst for people to come and drink’: forgiveness! And what joy it gives us! »

*Sister Anne Emmanuelle*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Some news flashes from the past year:

◀ At the beginning of the year the whole Community was able to participate in a few days’ retreat with Father Symeon of the Orthodox monastery of St. Silouane. The theme, “To be or to exist”, expressed well the invitation to cast off everything which weighs us down, to take off our sandals before the One who IS, whom we allow to touch us and transform us.

◀ This summer’s **Council** gave us the opportunity to explore more deeply last

year’s theme, “Community and Otherness”. It was a time rich in significant sharing, encounters and celebration. There was the joy of sister Birgit’s taking her final vows, and the joy of welcoming brother François, and then brothers Alois and Richard, from Taizé the day after 16 August, the first anniversary of brother Roger’s death; we observed it with an extended evening office, to which many people came. Brother Franz, a Dominican brother and faithful friend, led our community retreat during this time we were together.

◀ With the arrival of Mariane, and receiving her as a postulant, we have welcomed a new face from the Congo; a great joy for all of us, but especially for sister Eve-Evelyne.

◀ The “Amandier”, our oldest house, whose chapel was dedicated 70 years ago, has been treated to a fine restoration and rejuvenation! Months of work were needed to renovate its badly damaged façade, and its roof. We are endlessly grateful to the various teams of workers for their good co-operation amongst themselves. During the period when the work caused a great deal of noise and dust, our eldest sisters were able to spend two weeks at Côte-aux-Fees with sister Mechthild, where they benefitted from the hospitality of the former presbytery and had the joyous experience of being in a small community where each one could contribute her best self.

◀ Among the numerous birthdays, counting many years and decades, sister Danièle’s 90 years were celebrated with several parties.... but the high point was a flight in a hot-air balloon, of which she had long been dreaming!

◀ April 30th was a fine day of thanksgiving for the 50th anniversary of the **Third Order of Unity** (TOU), bringing together a great many people from the different groups in Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Benin [West Africa]. Three people have made commitments as new members during the course of this year – Barbara Kwast of the Netherlands, Eva-Marie Gürke of Switzerland and Father Bernard de Margerie of Canada!

◀ The Servants of Unity held their annual meeting on the theme “Our life dedicated to

the service of unity”, a subject which gave rise to fruitful conversations in small groups which included both members and Grandchamp sisters.

◀ Ecumenical meetings, meetings of religious in different countries, the WCC Assembly in Brazil, and pilgrimages widened our horizons:

- pilgrimage of trust with youth at the Taizé meeting in Milan, for sisters Lauranne and Eve-Evelyne
- pilgrimages to renew contacts with communities, monasteries and friends: in Poland for sister Michèle, in Romania for sister Minke and Elisabeth Strübin, former pastor in Gelterkinden, who is very close to our sisters at Sonnenhof
- pilgrimage on part of the road to Santiago de Compostella, for sister Irmtraud
- pilgrimage to the memorial of the former concentration camp at Buchenwald, for a group of novices with sister Regina and Brother Peter during their brief stay at Imshausen; a powerful and moving experience which they shared with us at the end of our Council meeting.

◀ Various **missions**:

- in response to an invitation from Bishop Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter of the North Elbian Lutheran Church, Germany, and following last year’s experience, sisters Christel and Sabine were glad to lead again a pastors’ retreat at Ratzeburg
- sisters Lucie-Martine and Vreni led a day-long retreat at Lamastre in Ardèche, France, for the people working on plans for a retreat centre
- sister Hélène took part for a third time in the ongoing ecumenical prayer in Brussels, in a chapel in the heart of the European Parliament district.

◀ We were enriched by many **visits** which opened us to very different realities and topics. Just to mention a few:

- Dr. Stricker of the magazine *Glaube in der Welt*, on church reality in Eastern Europe
- Dina and Nani from Indonesia, involved in reconstruction work there, following the tsunami
- Pastor Njato and his family from Madagascar
- Nara from the Brotherhood of the Suffering Servant in Brazil
- Théo Buss, who is currently working in Nicaragua
- Pastor Simon Kossi Dossou, president of the Methodist Church in Benin
- Margareta and her family from Poznan, Poland
- Dr. Choffat from the Corbière Health Centre, a friend of the Community, shared his thoughts regarding developments in the cost of health care. We were very sorry to hear about the fire at the Centre in September, and impressed by the wave of solidarity which has been shown.

◀ **At Sonnenhof** there have again been changes amongst the sisters, but stability is provided by the life of prayer and liturgy, and the receiving of guests thirsty for quiet and spiritual resources. Sister Eva-Maria is now the eldest of the group and the only Swiss! Sister Miriam has returned to Grandchamp, and sister Sabine has come back to the beauty of the Basel area.

◀ In February, sister Ursula joined sisters Maatje and Claire-Irène at St. Elisabeth in Israel. With them we share in the suffering of our friends in Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, and of all those who were hurt by the war in Lebanon.

◀ For sisters Anne-Geneviève and Renée in **Algiers**, the presence of sister Vroni, Deaconess of the Methodist Church of Basel has been very much appreciated; she has brought new energy to the parish life of the Protestant Church in Algiers. Marie-Laure Ivanov also shared the life of our sisters there for several months, during which she learned about the medical world in Algeria and about a different face of Islam from that of Iraq.

◀ Flearstift at **Woudsend** (Netherlands) celebrated its 25th anniversary! Many friends helped to prepare a festive day, full of surprises, in thankfulness to Maria de Groot and sister Christianne for their commitment and their receiving of guests, working on biblical reading.

Throughout the year at **Grandchamp** we have welcomed guests coming in search of quiet, spiritual resources, or help in finding a Christian position in the face of the challenges of our world. Groups, retreats and Bethasda sessions, one after another, have kept us in contact in many ways with the realities of church and society.

- A weekend for parents of our novices was the occasion for deep and true sharing on both sides.
- We had the joy of a return visit, for a day, from the “Veilleurs” de Suisse.
- In July, a small group of schoolboys and girls from Karlsruhe, Germany, shared in our life of prayer and work in order to learn about the monastic life.

◀ How can we express our gratitude for the presence and support of women and men who have shared in our life of prayer and work for a few weeks or months: Shawn from Canada, Carlo from Australia, Nina from

Poland, Rita from Lebanon, Dina from Israel, and so many others, such as Bernard who comes very regularly to do various maintenance tasks, and our neighbours sister Ursula Barthelmey and Madame Wölfli.

Religious from several different communities have spent time with us: little sister Virginia from Algeria, little sister Lai Fong from Hongkong, sisters Aline and Fernande from Canada, sister Irena from Poland, and Sister Veronika of Selbitz, who was preparing for her installation as the new prioress of her community. With them we experienced the profound communion in prayer which knits us together as an invisible monastic community across continents, confessions and cultures...

◀ Regular ties with different groups give us the chance to make progress in understanding and respecting differences, especially

- the Interreligious Group of Neuchâtel and the Interreligious Monastic Dialogue
- the Orthodox Parish of Neuchâtel: a few of its members meet with a few of our sisters for “Jesus prayer”
- EREN (Reformed Church in Neuchâtel): participation in Synod meetings, contact

with parish presidents who come to share and to carry with us in prayer their concerns about the life of the church, and the many pastors who are available to celebrate the Eucharist with us

- Professor Armand Abecassis and all those who attend his course on midrash readings
- Thérèse Gardon, who leads workshops on biblical Hebrew

As the year draws to a close, in the light of the communion of saints, we think of people close to us who have entered into God’s eternity, among them Manfred Dörr, sister Violette Pointet, Suzanne Hartmann and Hanni Hasler of TOU, Andre Mayor of FU, Solange Fernex, Murray Rogers... and Dom Frago, the former Bishop of Crateus in Brazil, on 12 August, the date on which brother Alfredinho died in 2000. Both were witnesses to communion with the poorest persons.

In the joy of the One who comes, freeing up the way of the wellspring to create a new humanity, we wish you a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year 2007!

*Sister Pierrette  
and the sisters of Grandchamp*

On the Website [www.grandchamp.org](http://www.grandchamp.org) you will find our programme for 2007,  
as well as our reading lists