

*How are you
Seeing things?*



Newsletter from Grandchamp 2015

"Re-inventing the connections ..."

In a meeting in February, Elena Lasida, an economist and theologian from Uruguay, shared her view and her reflections with us on the present crisis. She has written a book called: *Le goût de l'autre - la crise, une chance pour réinventer le lien* ('The taste for what is different - the crisis: an opportunity to reinvent the connections'). Sister Regina and Sister Elisabeth give us here a glimpse of her thought.

Elena surprised us with a greeting she had heard when staying in Mexico. Instead of simply saying 'How are things?' the members of one tribe would greet each other by saying: 'How are you seeing things?' This question stayed with us throughout the session.

How do we look at the world? Can we see that we are at present living a 'kairos' moment? - *the kairos is the propitious moment, the right time poised between death and life, between loss and new possibilities. Grace is revealed in disgrace, in an empty space. A new world is in the process of being born and we are called to give it birth.* We must be open to something radically new, just like the disciples who after the death of Jesus discovered an empty tomb and were sent by the Risen Christ into the unknown of a mission. And so the unknown becomes a source of life and invites us to believe that a future is possible, despite the economic, socio-political and ecological crises we are going through. What can help us to receive hope for this unpredictable future?

As Christians we are invited to bring changes into our way of living which lead to another model, another view of the 'good life'. The economy - which means 'household management' - is the place to think about 'life together'. In the shared home entrusted to humans, both locally and on the world scale, we have to manage together what is common to us all: the air, the water, the land. In this shared management called 'solidarity economics', it is not first and foremost a matter of making stuff to satisfy a need, but of thinking of people as creators of life that is good, and charged with the task of continuing creation, as it is proposed in the Book of Genesis. So solidarity economics changes our view of production and consumption, bearing in mind that the resources in the ecosystem are limited. It aims at transforming the crisis into a call to create something new.

The understanding of the 'good life' on which western society is based - material well-being, self-sufficiency and the individual as 'king', and values that are absolute - has led to an impasse. We have to invent something new. For that, Elena proposes a new view of the link between solidarity economics and the three vows of religious life - poverty, chastity and obedience - which she sees as a 'prophetic' way of life. They can allow us to live a good life in a different way, rediscovering the source of values that are

common to all people, whatever their cultural and social context. Seen from outside the vows speak of deprivation: renouncing control of material goods, giving up marriage and having children, giving up being a free agent. It is less easy to see the life-giving values in the vows: relationship, joining in, fruitfulness, recognition of otherness and becoming interdependent.

Poverty is not to be found on the level of what we have, but in what we are, in our relationship to material goods. The relational dimension is at the heart of it and becomes an invitation to be free. Am I really free in relation to what I have? Elena proposes that we live this experience of freedom not as being independent but by being interdependent; holding things in common we also share the responsibility and care for goods. If the ultimate purpose of economic activity is not to accumulate material goods, it should allow each of us to put our creativity to work and enhance social bonds by holding things in common and sharing them.

Chastity is about relationship with the other, 'the other' who is different and whom we are often tempted to label, to possess or to exclude. In living together, where each one has their place and difference is respected, 'the other' always eludes us, is always beyond what we can understand or know. 'The other' belongs to humanity and so opens us to relate to what is universal. Chastity also speaks of a new way of looking at a person's creative capacity, not only what is physical, but in giving life or giving birth to something as yet unknown. In living together there is complementarity and reciprocity. Life circulates and the birth of something new and unexpected then becomes possible.

Obedience questions the relationship between the individual and the group, and invites us to a triple 'displacement': from independence to interdependence, from strength to fragility; from contract to covenant. According to Elena, this change of perspective has brought a revolution into the heart of economic theory as it privileges relationships over things. So economic exchange contributes to building communities and builds the sense of belonging to a group. Only reciprocity makes this possible, not the market or the impersonal redistribution of material goods. The exchange takes place in making connections, not in being a consumer out of self-interest.

'The taste for another way', 'the taste for an economy of solidarity' is a challenge for the future. At the world summit on climate change in Paris, will we dare to find new paths, a new way of looking at our changing world? What will our response be to the question:

How are you seeing things?

On the first page : détail of a relief made in the monastery of Tamié

Looking back over the year

For many months this year on arriving in Grandchamp our guests and visitors were met by a huge building site: scaffolding and containers all indicating that a very big repair job was going on in one of our buildings. The roof was re-tiled, and inside there was painting, and attic conversions. This work will continue until beginning of 2016, but already we can admire the new roof and facade and rejoice in the beauty of our hamlet. Less visible and more hidden and modest are other 'building sites' that have been organised to make our daily life, which is often demanding, rich in a variety of encounters and significant moments, with challenges, new beginnings and invitations to look at things differently.

"You are the salt of the earth"! These words are both an affirmation and a call and were the theme of our Council in the summer. The theme joined us in a communion with the Taizé brothers, and to so many young people on all continents who are invited to put into practice this call to become 'salt of the earth', and who were getting ready for the big meeting in the summer called: 'towards a new solidarity'.

'You are the salt of your country ...you are the light of the world', Brother Richard translated it thus when he led the retreat during our Council. In this time several sisters were able to express what it meant to them to be 'salt of the earth.' Here is what one of the sisters has to say:

As a young woman minister I was painfully challenged by the fact that the word I preached was not easily accessible to my listeners. That is when I discovered the Grandchamp community. There I found what I had been

looking for and longing for in order to respond to the call I had received: to live Christ with others for the world. Being with sisters is a sign, a word, a simple presence that witnesses to the Gospel lived out in real life. This call was confirmed to me in my noviciate by St Paul's words: 'you are a letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts...' 2 Cor 3,3. But what message can we transmit as 'a letter from Christ' by means of our life together?

Down the years, various answers have been given to me: first of all that in our broken world, marked more and more by individualism and rivalry, distrust and fear, the simple fact of being able to live together, because of the love of Christ and by His Spirit, with all our differences in age, nationality and culture was indeed a living word, and our very existence opens a space of hope for the human family.

Later I had this conviction: that in our world where the push for efficiency often leads to exhaustion, the dimension of the gifted-ness of our life together in the presence of God could be a sign. It is not only human effort that gives meaning to life, but a working together of people and God: human effort and the work of the Spirit. By saying 'yes' to the work of the Spirit within, we allow God to continue the work of creation and to complete it. The transformation of human beings into the image of Christ by the Spirit gives meaning and hope for the life of every person and that of the whole human family.

Later again, I discovered that our commitment to sharing and community of goods could be an urgent challenge in our consumer society. I have been able to witness how certain guests have been

led to reflect on the way they use their own possessions.

So the conviction has grown in me that by our simple existence, always fragile but open to the work of the Spirit, we witness to a God who loves the world, is at work in it and is preparing with us a future of communion in Him for all humanity. In this way perhaps we can be that 'salt of the earth' that Jesus talks about, a grain of salt which can give flavour to life in the great human family.

sr Ingeborg-Marie

2015 is the Year of Consecrated Life announced by Pope Francis. It is also a year of commemoration in Taizé marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of Brother Roger, the 75th anniversary since he arrived in Taizé and the 10th anniversary of his death. It was an invitation for us to revisit the essential dates in our own vocation, to return to our own sources. If spiritual retreats were the earth from which our community grew, the contributions of Taizé, and of Brother Roger, in particular have been essential.

At Taizé different celebrations and events have marked the year, and one of these was a week of reflection on the present situation of religious life. Three novices with Sister Lanto from Mamre, Madagascar, took part in that week's meeting. They wrote:

If the clothes line in front of the dormitories in Taizé could speak, it would have spoken the variety of colours and patterns of religious habits, scapulars, veils and t-shirts with logos of congregations from all around the world that it carried from the 5th-12th July 2015 in scorching weather, during this week of 'reflection on the present

situation of the monastic or religious vocation'. 350 young Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox sisters and brothers, monks and nuns from 52 countries gathered for the meeting! Amongst all these were three novices from Grandchamp! Added to the young people there were more than 25 speakers, many of whom were superiors and heads of their communities. They shared their perception of the present state of religious life, and Sister Pierrette gave a beautiful testimony on 'monastic life and the urgency of reconciliation.'

The speakers, though very attuned to the Holy Spirit, nevertheless kept their feet on the ground holding together the cries of the world and the stakes for life-together and all its demands. Sometimes feeling their way, sometimes daring to pronounce prophetic words, they stimulated us their questions about our presence in the world, our presence in places of conflict, our interdependence, ecumenism, and inter-culturalism. The important thing is *'to have the great experience of being in Christ and having Christ in you and understanding what it means to live in Christ'* the Coptic Bishop Anba Thomas told us.

Living in Christ, we were invited not to stop at words! We prayed together three times a day, experienced a great simplicity of life. We journeyed through the week in small groups for sharing and deepening what we had heard. One group brought together a sister active in student pastoral ministry, a contemplative sister of the Carthusian tradition - who usually only speaks about once a week - a brother from Haiti who works on the outskirts of Paris... and a Grandchamp sister who tries to live out the balance between prayer, work and hospitality. Yes, religious life is truly alive. Each one of us was touched personally:

“For me this meeting was not just intellectual reflection. Through the shared life and friendships made, I became more deeply aware of our riches, our diversity, but also of the challenges of religious life today. Now it is wonderful when I hear the name of one or other community or confession to be able to put a face to it.”

“Sharing these days with so many people who choose commitment in religious life, in faith and in openness to others, has been for me a time of renewal and a sign of hope. The common setting of Taizé enabled us to live a truly enriching time. We could discover the beauty and richness of all the different ways of living a religious vocation and see too our complementarity, with the importance and the value of our differences”.

“Do you, out of love for Christ, wish to consecrate yourself wholly to Him?” A visible communion has been created among us because of our belonging to Christ. Here and now, in Him, there is always ‘something new’. As we reflected on this together we touched on this hidden reality. Seeing joy in others, I saw a reflection of my own joy at being able to live this expression of my own desire.”

Sisters Embla, Svenja and Sonja.

Being salt of the earth... Amongst all the many rich encounters that have marked this year, the time with Michael Lapsley was particularly moving. An Anglican Priest in South Africa, he was involved in the struggle against apartheid and was the victim of an assassination attempt in 1990. The explosion of a letter bomb took both his hands, one eye, and smashed his eardrums. From this tragic event he drew strength and a disarming

compassion; he refused to let himself be overcome by hatred ‘that poison that risks taking us over and passing from one generation to the next’. An impressive testimony!

Two community visits gave rise to some wonderful fellowship and sharing: with the sisters of the Word of Life, and with about 15 Dominican brothers. We also had the pleasure of welcoming two Spanish sisters of the Order of the Trinity who came to share their search for an open monastic life suitable for our day. And those of our sisters who had not yet had the chance to discover Hauterive Abbey were invited by the brothers to a meeting there to share on reconciliation. All these meetings were stimulating and enriching.

The Contemplative exercises at Auschwitz

A participant shares with us:

There is not much to see in the huge complex of Auschwitz-Birkenau ... Where to look? At the black pond where the ashes of thousands of murdered women, children and men lie? ‘What matters is what you choose to look at?’ declared Karin Seethaler, who with Sister Michèle, led the retreat. I was haunted by one question: is it possible to look at what heals when your heart is shattered in the face of so much suffering and horror? Living in the presence of God, yes, it was possible. Not letting oneself be overcome by evil, but discovering, precisely in this place, the magnitude of God’s love. It was possible and I am infinitely grateful for that. The presence of Father Manfred Deselaers, who has been working in

Auschwitz for 25 years, gave so much to our ecumenical and international group. An unforgettable sign of reconciliation was the prayer for the dead led by Stanislaw Krajewski of Warsaw, a Jewish friend to Grandchamp, who sang the prayer with us on the ruins of the crematorium. Another sign of reconciliation was the Eucharistic hospitality extended to us by the Catholic Bishop Roman Prindel when he came to see us. Yes, these days were blessed.

Claudia Lempp.

In our spiritual family:

* The Third Order of Unity celebrated its 60th anniversary at their annual meeting this year and chose the theme that will accompany them for the next two years: 'Living Christ for the world'. Gerda Tenkink from the Netherlands and Véronique Husi from the Yverdon group made their commitments this year.

* During their session, the Servants of Unity had a fascinating day with Sister Sabine Laplane who spoke about her book 'Frère Roger, de Taizé; avec presque rien' ('Brother Roger of Taizé...with next to nothing').

In our different locations:

At the **Sonnenhof**, the little group of sisters move ahead full of confidence, well supported by the members of the Freundeskries both practically and at the level of reflection, with the members of the Coordinating Team in particular. But questions remain. Should we move towards expanding the sisters' team by looking for other people, a couple for

example? We consider the fundamental question of the 'vocation' of the house. How can we renew and think again about receiving guests in today's context?

*At **Lomme**, the sisters of the fraternity continue to take up the challenge of unity lived in daily life. Sister Hélène, who has been involved since the beginning of this ecumenical adventure, will soon return to Grandchamp.

*At **Woudsend**, with the years passing, the look of the groups has changed, but the joy of Sister Christianne and of Maria in seeking a word for living God's presence today remains the same.

*In the **Holy Land**, a first hopeful step is just beginning to take shape which may respond to our wish to be present in this land with others. Sister Regina is preparing to share the life of the Little Sisters of Jesus in one of their fraternities. It is another new concrete sign of the bond that unites us to the Little Sisters, many of whom have visited us this year here in Grandchamp.

Where to turn our gaze?

Today as in the past, our hearts ache at the suffering and horrors happening in the world. So where and how can we discern the signs of God's loving plan? God often speak to us in small things: a look, a welcoming gesture... We are witnesses to this as we realize once more how we are surrounded by good will and friendship and prayer. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for your generosity, your support, your faithfulness...

We are touched by all that. A special thank-you to our tenants for their flexibility and their patience during all

the building work, also to our guests for their understanding when sometimes the calm of the hamlet has been disturbed by noise. Thanks too to all the builders who have been on the site, to our architects Carole Zini and Kurt Kohler, and to all our volunteers and helpers...

May this new Advent help us to turn our eyes towards the One who comes to join us in the heart of our fragility and of our night. He Himself comes in the fragility of an infant, He who is the Prince of Life!

Your Sisters of Grandchamp



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