

*Daring to take
the path to the future*



Newsletter from Grandchamp 2013

DARING TO TAKE THE PATH TO THE FUTURE...

That was the theme of our Council, seeking the direction for our common journey this year. It has been quite a stormy year with a number of testing times that sometimes left us truly vulnerable. But it was a year also marked by events giving us hope and promise for the future with signs that life is at work there. We think for example of the lifelong 'Yes' pronounced by Sr Miriam and by Sr Mariane - the first African to make a commitment in the community - on 25th August, the day of their profession which was a beautiful illustration of this promise!

Daring the path, daring to take steps... that means accepting to set out towards the unknown, travelling on, going forward steadily without rushing, ever re-orientating ourselves, with the path being revealed as we walk, as on a pilgrimage.

* Sister Veronika had the actual experience as she took part in the *pilgrimage* of the Fraternity of the Suffering Servant in Brazil.

* There was a *pilgrimage* too for the four Team members of the Third Order of Unity with Sister Catherine who visited the Benin group for a retreat with them in Toffo, Benin, at the monastery of the Benedictine sisters, where they rejoiced at the commitment of Eusèbe Gnanhoui. *'We felt a sense of wonder before God for the deep communion lived there between brothers and sisters, Africans and Europeans, Christians of different denominations, both Catholic and Protestant and the grace of being able to experience this profound unity which is so*

important to us all. Also on the 27th April, Sr Marie-Reine, the prioress of the Monastery and Father Serge the Chaplain, took part in the celebration of Eusèbe's commitment service with us at the place where we met, and this continued the next day in the chapel where the homily took up the theme of our retreat again: God's great Yes to us and our simple yes in response'.

(Lucette Woungly -Massaga).

Apart from Eusèbe, five others have dared to take this step of committing themselves in the Third Order of Unity: Seintje Bos, Sjoukje Hoeksema, and Elly Snaterse for the group in the Netherlands, and Christine Steidle and Annelie Dörr for the German - speaking groups.

Daring to take the way to the future that the Spirit of God prepares for us is to let Him lead us step by step, and perhaps to let ourselves be pushed around at times. It means going forward with others who are also on the way with us, seeking and needing us as we need them. Are we not members of each other? It means opening up in an exchange of gifts, in accepting our dependence on each other as a blessing and being conscious of the body of which we are all a part.

*At Sonnenhof Sister Christel had actually started on this path already when she was stopped in her tracks by a cerebral haemorrhage. For her a long period of patient and trusting re-adaptation has begun. For us all too it is a new situation that challenges our flexibility, our ingenuity and that of our friends, as Elisabeth Strübin shares with us later in this letter.

*St Elisabeth: Sister Dorothea returned there at the end of October with Sr Maatje for a month, and they had the pleasure of welcoming Sr Cordula of Imshausen for a few weeks. Another sister should join her but we are keeping our ears open on this. The future may be in opening up to others in order to be, together, a humble sign of hope in this torn land.

*For three years now the ecumenical Fraternity of Lomme near Lille, where Sr Hélène lives, has been witnessing already to that openness, an adventure of faith that brings together four different communities.

*We rejoice in Sr Renée's great faithfulness in Algeria. Sr Anne-Geneviève was able to join her there for two short stays this year, in order to keep her links with friends. We rejoice too in the continuing work with groups that Sr Christianne and Maria de Groot are able to do in Woudsend, that Sr Pierrette had the joy of discovering in the spring!

A LOOK AT THE SONNENHOF

'While I tried to put my thoughts on paper on the life at Sonnenhof, Sr Minke's life was coming to its end and her funeral service is already over. It all seemed very unreal to me, for the contagious vivacity of Sr Minke remained palpable especially in relation to Sonnenhof. She loved this place very much as it meant for her the place where the community consciously opened out towards the North and the East, creating a bridge between the French and German speaking regions. The main feature

being that non French-speaking guests can benefit from the spirituality of Grandchamp. That is why it is extremely important for the house to remain open to all the many people who wish to make retreats and be accompanied by the sisters.

The road leading up to Sonnenhof is steep, but when you arrive, the view from there offers a wide horizon, full of light and shadows playing on the mountain ridges of the Jura. Sometimes that seems to be a parable to me. The Sonnenhof has seen much light but also shadows too this year. Often we have had to climb steep paths, but the horizon always opened out before us, full of God's love visible in all and above all as a help for us to overcome what seemed impossible.

The group of sisters at Sonnenhof has got smaller; at present seven sisters live and work there. Absences due to illness have made their task even more difficult, and sr Christel's stroke at the end of July particularly left its mark on them and obliged them and a certain number of the Community's close friends to think seriously about the future. For some time it had seemed evident that the community needed more help from outside. The financial situation has fortunately allowed the increase in the hours worked by the helpers from outside.

A Circle of Friends for Sonnenhof: At the beginning of the year, Sr Christel had the idea of a 'Circle of Friends for Sonnenhof' and spoke about this to the Reverend Richard Haug of Tubingen as well to myself. We took this idea to heart and worked on it with Sr Christel and then with Sr Mechthild, presently the sister in

charge of Sonnenhof supported by sr Thérèse. A pilot group that is regularly in contact with Grandchamp has been created. At present we are about to form this circle of friends that by their prayer, their financial and practical help will be able to support the commitment of the sisters to Sonnenhof so that it remains a place of blessing.

Many people are attached to Sonnenhof. We had proof of that with the numerous gifts that were given when we had to install a new heating system in the main building. Other urgent pieces of work have also been able to be completed and we thank the many donors with all our hearts! If we invite people to create a circle of friends, it is in order to give the sisters long-term support.

People's attachment to Sonnenhof and their gratitude for it is shown in different ways! Following Sr Christel's illness, I took over the job of directing the building work for the time being. I had to contact the contractors to tell them about the new situation. It allowed me to sense the good will that surrounds Sonnenhof and to see how many people were touched to hear of Sr Christel's illness. Some of these firms have been working with the community for decades and their love of the house is transmitted from father to son. These people too express in their own way their gratitude for the prayer and presence of the sisters.

Daring to take the path to the future

The theme chosen by the Grandchamp sisters for this year, seems particularly apt and significant for the Sonnenhof! Yes, we dare to

turn towards the future, we, that is the sisters, the founding Board, the members of the Third Order, as well as the numerous friends of the Sonnenhof, both men and women. All of us want to make our contribution to enable the sisters to continue to keep this house open and to welcome guests for accompaniment on their path with God'.

Elisabeth Strübin.

This year was of course marked by Sister Albertine's entry into God's light on 5th February and that of Sister Minke on the 19th October. We turn the page in the history of the Community, where Sister Minke was prioress for almost thirty years.

Friends of the Community, sisters and brothers of other religious communities, members of the Third Order of Unity from Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Servants of Unity, Foyers of Unity, representatives of different churches and other religious traditions - you all came in large numbers to join us for the thanksgiving celebration on the 23rd October. Here are some lengthy extracts from Sister Pierrette's words of welcome and from the homily of Brother Mark-Ephrem.

Words of welcome from s. Pierrette

"It is good to be together to entrust sr Minke to God's infinite mercy. Thank you for your prayer, your friendship and support all through these last weeks when Sr Minke's health deteriorated so very rapidly. She was by then feeling close to her final passing.

We think with great affection of her family who are in communion with us today : her two brothers, Jan and Pieter in Canada – who were here at the beginning of October to see her again – their families, her nieces Maggie and Rachel as well as relatives and friends in the Netherlands.

We want to give thanks to God for the gift of Sister Minke's life in our midst, for all she was as Prioress of the Community for 30 years at a critical time in its history. She took over from Mère Marie, barely nine years after the death of Mère Geneviève. Sr Minke did everything she could to ensure the Community lived on, bringing it together and enabling it to be rooted in its deepest sources: in Christ crucified and risen again, in attentiveness to his Word, in setting up retreats and in finding inspiration in the Rule written by Brother Roger of Taizé. She thus enabled the Community to grow with inner cohesion and in its own identity, in its ecumenical vocation and its openness to the People of the First Covenant and to other religious traditions, as well as to the world as it is today.

Sr Minke was marked by the War, and the call to reconciliation between peoples and cultures dwelt deep within her. Tirelessly she watched over the work God entrusted to her so that the Community could become a place of communion, of praise and hope, a humble reflection of that *'House of Prayer for all Nations'* according to the words of the Prophet Isaiah. She dedicated her strength to the task, committed all her faith to it, always pointing us towards our goal: living Christ for the world, *'so that*

Love might be loved' – she delighted in quoting those words of Saint Francis – that greater love which had one day taken hold of her, the immense mercy of Christ for every living person. She was indwelt by Jesus' own compassionate view of the beleaguered crowds without a shepherd.

'Nur Christus', Christ alone : she received this first 'word' from Mère Geneviève at the very start of her path in Community and it accompanied her always, working deep into her and carrying her along throughout her life, just as the last words did, 'I trust' – words opening out into the future, and preparing that future.

These last weeks Sr Minke remained very peaceful and she communicated that peace to all who came to her. *'Only gratitude now'* she would say in a whisper *'all has been reconciled'*.

Yes we are borne along by a greater love. Another has gone before us here into this 'Arche' and under the marquee. The Risen Christ stands here in our midst and says to us, as he said to his disciples, *'Peace be with you'*. May we receive the peace he offers us that Sr Minke has now received in all its fullness."

Homily of Bro. Mark-Ephrem Nolan
OSB of the Holy Cross Monastery
(Rostrevor Northern Ireland)

"The context in which we find ourselves is that of the Eucharist : the celebration of thanksgiving *par excellence*. At the heart of this celebration we will echo this verse

from psalm 116: *How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?*

We echo this Scriptural word as we express our grateful recognition to God *for all the good He has done for us* and in particular today we give thanks for all the good He has done for us through the life and ministry of His servant, Sr Minke. The word that I retain for today is GRATITUDE.

Earlier this year I found myself at Grandchamp at the same time as Mother Gertrude of the Abbey of Maigrange. In a conversation we both remarked how impressed we were to witness the extent to which Sr Minke was filled with gratitude to God for all that has been accomplished in the community since its foundation and with thanksgiving for all that is lived here today under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, facilitated by Sr Pierrette's ministry of communion.

It is evident that Sr Minke played an important role in the history and evolution of the community. Throughout her thirty years as Prioress she opened up Grandchamp to many rich ecclesial experiences and encouraged within the community a great attention to the realities of the contemporary world. (...)

Sr Minke explained that she began each day with a sense of great gratitude for the gift of life. She welcomed in the chant of the *Benedictus* the occasion to give thanks *for the love of the heart of our God which visits us each day like the dawn from on high*. This daily experience was for Sr Minke a source of hope.

She was very acutely aware that she had need of the immense love of our God and of His great mercy. It is

because she trusted implicitly in the love and mercy of God that she was not afraid of her weaknesses. She knew herself to be a flawed creature.

With great honesty she dared to name her faults and failings in what she shared with others in speech as well as through the written word. She knew that she needed God's merciful love and gracious pardon to be manifested to her through the mediation of other people - and to begin with through her Sisters in community life. She really counted upon their pardoning love. (...)

Despite her desire to change her ways, Sr Minke readily admitted that she did not quite know how to correct what she called the *spontaneous dimension* of her personality. She consoled herself by the firm belief that the Lord and others welcomed her as she was. It is above all in community life that she experienced the welcoming love of God and His great compassion in her regard. For Sr Minke it is a Christian community's vocation to be a living parable of reconciliation. She believed that, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, the community is called to live and bear witness to *mercy*, with *joy* and *simplicity*. (...)

Christ was everything in her life. *Nur Christus!* Listening to an interview Sr Minke gave to Bro. Thierry I was struck by the way in which she spoke of Christ. Christ had really taken hold of her life and she allowed herself to be held by Him. (...)

The regard of recognition that Christ poses upon us gives us to recognise ourselves such as we truly are. More than that, His regard posed upon us

helps us to see what we are called to become in Him.

At the end of the day, it is in Christ that we find ourselves and are restored, raised up and re-created!

At the eventide of her earthly life Sr Minke could say in all simplicity: *What a long road to have to travel to become who one truly is! (...)*

At the end of her earthly journey she hoped that Christ would pose His merciful regard of compassion upon her. Speaking of death she said: *That moment will be the moment of our face to face encounter. I am not afraid. I don't know how I will live this passage, but I know it will be good to meet the Lord. I pray the name of Jesus a lot. His name will be in me at the hour of my death. I believe therefore that Jesus will live in my heart as I live my passage into the fullness of His presence. I will see Christ look at me - and His regard will be one of mercy and compassion. (...)*

Speaking of her hope of eternal life, she said: *Then it will well and truly be faith taken seriously life with Christ!*

We are journeying towards a face to face encounter. What we carry in our hearts today as a thirst, a desire, will be satisfied in reality. (...)

Now His faithful servant has gone! The One who is *love of all love, the Risen Christ*, the love of her life, was waiting for her. (...) I perceive Sr Minke bathed in the light of Christ and I hear her speak to me: *I am inhabited by an immense gratitude*

Yes, an immense gratitude ... and great confidence. These are the words of the beginning and the end. Amen!"

Pilgrimage

*Everything that passes
Is part of the Pilgrimage
To the final passing
With no way back.*

*Little by little
I welcome it
I abandon myself to it
I trust.*

*Consenting
In the Yes
Received and given
Out of love.*

*To that I commit
I can now
Knowing more clearly
Than before
That I will have to do it
Alone*

*Without any other support
But the desire
At long last to see
Your face.*

*This desire in me goes deep
So the fear
And the dread of nothingness
Can slowly pass away.*

*For your name
In my heart
Finds its place through my breathing
And dwells there by yours*

*And the tears
The silence
The solitude
Open now to your presence.*

* * *

Sister Minke (2004)
(translated from the French)

Still more gratitude... this is what we wish to express to you all of you who have so generously supported us all this year and more especially at the death of our sisters with so many gestures of friendship and messages that have deeply moved us. Thank you for your prayerful presence at our side and thank you for your friendship, your trust, your gifts...

for this grace of a communion that draws us all to start again always anew on the path of humble pilgrims, allowing ourselves to be led by his Spirit of goodness.

May the joy and peace of the Emmanuel accompany you on the path of this new year!

The Sisters of Grandchamp

Communauté de Grandchamp
Grandchamp 4 ; CH 2015 AREUSE
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On the Website
www.grandchamp.org
you will find our programme for 2014,
as well as our reading lists