

*Towards  
a reconciled world*



Newsletter from Grandchamp 2012

## *A future being born*

A prayer continues to nourish us and to fill us with hope: *Let your spirit of goodness lead us into a new land.* It makes us lift our eyes to the horizon as we walk, and see a future of peace with justice for all, in a universe that is reconciled and reveals the fulfilment of all God's promises. It invites us to shine the light of this future into the present, into our hopes and commitments, and to let that light direct our choices day by day. It invites us to this, especially when testing times, increasing insecurity and constant conflicts bringing suffering to whole populations are likely to overwhelm us and make us thoroughly discouraged and ready to give up. The horizon can vanish from our sight.

A future being born beginning with the coming of Jesus and with the mystery of his death and resurrection. Throughout his life Jesus let the breath of God's good Spirit guide him, right into the night of his passion, without ever responding to evil with revenge, without ever giving way to the spiral of violence. He responded with an ever greater love to scorn, hatred and rejection : "Father forgive them..." and he transformed death into the gateway to new life. His resurrection is the break through of something completely new into our world and our history. It opens a new beginning for all humanity and for creation itself. First-born from among the dead, Jesus has opened up a way to what was beyond our wildest dreams - a new humanity, a place of unity. All is accomplished, all is given but just in embryo. A *secret resurrection*, "because it happens at night (...) and does not impose itself from outside. It is an outpouring of life that affects us from within" (Eloi Leclerc). It is an embryo called to grow and flourish with the breath of Pentecost.

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Easter and Pentecost were one and the same mystery, a decisive event that concerned the whole cosmos. From then on, the Spirit that was poured on all flesh has been working the soil of our inner lives and of the earth on which we live. *The whole creation groans now in birth pangs, the birth of a new world. Creation waits impatiently for the revelation of the sons and daughters of God* (Rom 8:19,22). Its future is inextricably bound up with ours. Creation needs us, human beings, in order to come to its fulfilment, for the future is prepared in the microcosm that we are. Creation **waits** for the rising of people, again and again, people who are reconciled, in peace, this *multitude of brothers and sisters* of whom Jesus is the firstborn.

The labour of giving birth to new life, the life of Christ in us; that is the story of a lifetime. It is for us to welcome the Word, as Mary did, and to let it become flesh in our flesh and bear its fruit, making us witnesses of the Risen one, of the forgiveness of God, making us peacemakers. God does not step into our place. Rather he longs for us to use our freedom. He invites us to work with the Spirit, to

espouse within us the rhythm of the life longing to be born. It means a letting be: not passivity, but allowing the whole of one's being to participate in this birthing. Thus God entrusts to us the completion of his work.

*Into a new land* ... means entering into God's plan and to actively make it our own, deciphering, reading and receiving our own lives, and that of the world and of the Church, in the light of universal reconciliation:

- Tirelessly remaining close to the Source and accepting a slow and gradual journey of transformation, inner unification, an opening of our hearts to become people of communion.

- Daring to walk the way of trust, being open to the other who is different (in culture, confession, religion...) and going out to meet him, her, refusing to be enclosed in fear, distrust or prejudice of any kind.

- Living day by day the forgiveness that alone can open relationships to a new beginning.

- Choosing to live simply and in solidarity, sharing our possessions, seeking justice amongst people

- Growing in the awareness of a fundamental interdependence within all that is created, an awareness that invites us to be humble: we are not only stewards of God's creation, but creatures among other creatures.

As we yield to the Breath of God's good Spirit, we learn to live as reconciled people and we journey with men and women of all traditions towards this future that is taking place, letting the horizon shed light on our journey as the days pass. The way we look upon the profound shifts in today's world will thus bring hope. It is not a naïve way of looking that ignores the evil all around us, but seeing with a faith that refuses to tarry in the shadows that can surround us to the point of burying us in despair. When we turn our gaze towards God's future, which is already present in small signs, and when we marvel at it, then our heart can bear suffering. Like St Francis, with all living creatures, we can sing of the Light, and of the Love that is stronger than evil and death; Light, Love, that reconcile us and give us life and open us to a different future.

Sister Pierrette

***A new land...** We had a little foretaste of this in our last community meeting! Four witnesses from different religious traditions were with us: Claire Ly from Cambodia a Christian Catholic convert from Buddhism, the Grand Rabbi Guedj, our Sufi friend Allaoui, and the Reverend Timothy Reymond, all wanting to experience a meeting of hearts, a powerful time of welcome. Their wish was to share what animates us each deep down, and to travel together a little along the way towards that new land.*

*Here are two echoes of that meeting: the one by Maria de Groot from the Netherlands where, at Woudsend, she and Sister Christianne welcome groups to read the Scriptures together and thus to be inspired, and the testimony of Sister Anne-Geneviève.*

#### A FRUITFUL ENCOUNTER

Whenever I come home from Grandchamp, I come with a new vision of God or of others. Usually this helps me in my relationships because I gain a better knowledge of myself. This meeting in Grandchamp with people of different traditions has allowed me to do just that even more strongly. I learnt most from Rabbi Guedj. Jewish mysticism especially interests me so I was particularly receptive to his wisdom. How good it was to hear that we can deny our own ego to let the light of our deepest 'me' emerge. The word *tzim tzoum* buzzed about in the community for days afterwards!

To do *tzim tzoum* means: remove your selfishness and give room to God and to your deepest self, because there in the depths, the Eternal God is at work.

This vision is enough for me my whole life through... It also confirmed what I had already learnt from Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein: "Go to your centre, there you find the place of the Encounter which leads you where you must go".

The Rabbi emphasised our relationships, underlining that we cannot find God if we neglect others: "Unify your desire to God's desire" this Jewish wisdom enables us to have well-blessed encounters with others. I think that the community was inspired by this desire when they invited people of different traditions to bear witness. A community that opens up to other traditions is already a celebration. It was through inspiring testimonies that Jewish, Sufi, Buddhist and Christian thought and experience were revealed to us. I was thrilled by the presence amongst them of a woman, Claire Ly, who was intimately familiar with both Buddhism and Christianity. Personally I hope that women will support these fruitful meetings with people of different religions. That is happening in Grandchamp; the witness of a few sisters has enabled people to see through a reciprocal revelation, what riches, some still hidden, lie in the community.

A parable exists in spiritual tradition, that I have heard more than once, and I have retold it as follows:

There were three wise women who had been living together for a long time. They had never quarrelled. One day one of these three said: "Let's try and have a quarrel just as other people do". The other two said: "we don't know how". So the first one said: "I put a stone between us and I

say it's mine. You reply, no it's mine"; The argument will start on its own. No sooner said than done. The first woman put a stone in the middle of them and said: "That's my stone". The second replied: "No it's mine"; and the third added: "'t's mine". The first said again: "Of course it's yours, take it". The second woman continued and said to the third: "This stone is yours", and the third said: "it's yours". So with that they remained together and unable to quarrel. Three wise women, three religions, one stone that they give to each other...

Maria de Groot

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The meeting with our four witnesses touched me deeply - a time of real faith sharing by each one in great respect, mutual trust and true openness. It spoke to me of how much God, the divine, is at work in all hearts even if we do not put the same reality into the same words: our communion was such that we were able to pray together with texts from our different traditions.

This corresponded with what I received while living more than fifty years in Algeria, a Muslim country. For example, to take my presence in Ribat es Salam, the bond of Peace. It was not really an inter-religious dialogue group but a vocation to share everyday life with Muslims and Christians who are united in the same search for God. Prayer is very important along with sharing on a theme chosen by us together for our meetings, which take place twice a

year. The prayers from both sides, where we are generally all present, accompany our exchanges, and what is most precious to us, an hour of silent prayer together, broken spontaneously by a chorus or text from one or other tradition.

One of the speakers in our meeting said: "it's about rooting the other in her own faith and not to think that everyone has to see things our way". An Algerian friend, who was seriously disabled with a physical handicap, helped me to see that. When scorned by her family and thirsty in her faith, this woman allowed herself to be challenged by a Christian word from John Vanier who said: "Every person is a sacred story"; then by texts from Cheikh Bentounès, a Sufi master, that she could relate to, and on which we shared a great deal. In spite of her suffering, she is now at peace, rooted in her Sufi faith.

In these different experiences, I have been able to feel that tolerance above all it is the fruit of an inner openness to the other.

Intra-religious dialogue, as Claire Ly called it, is possible. It starts in our own hearts. It is not only possible, but it is the only sign that our rootedness in our own faith is authentic. It is a sign of the deepest things that we profess, a sign of what the great Rabbi Guedj expressed: "working towards harmony with opposing elements", or to say it with Allaoui: "reaching the point where there is no longer you and me but HIM".

Sister Anne-Geneviève

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## TRACES OF LIGHT

### “Traces of Light...”<sup>1</sup>

That is the title of Pastor Andreas Marti's book. The author is a close friend of ours at Sonnenhof. In his book he tells of his visits to monasteries in various parts of the world **including** one chapter about the sisters at Sonnenhof. I would like to express some of my own thoughts on this **book in the form** of a letter to a Buddhist sister:

Dear Sister Sumana,

It is a very colourful and diverse world that we discover in Andreas' book. Your monastery in Ladakh in the Himalayas in India has its place in it, just as the Sonnenhof has, our house in Switzerland. Our surroundings, our religious backgrounds, all seem so different and yet we are closely bound together in our inner journey. In us all there is that deep desire for unity within ourselves, for unison with God, and for the true meaning of this life. We want to learn what goodness and compassion really are, in other words just what being human means. Someone belonging to your tradition says:

*“Each human being has a spiritual hunger, in that we are all the same. When I understood this, I began to feel a deep respect for believers of other religions. I also realised how necessary it is to work along with others, together for the sake of our world.”*

With you Sumana and **with all of you, the men and women** who speak in this book, I feel bound together in a great, invisible network. It is both a thrill and challenge to know that monks and nuns rooted in various ways in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity are living out the same profound, spiritual journey. I can only agree with what you say:

*“The place from which I can produce changes in the world is inside myself. From there I can work in the world.”*

A voice from Burma also finds many echoes in my heart:

*“Goodness makes itself felt in meditation like energy. That is where compassion can emerge. It is a spiritual attitude, a deep inner experience of knowing that we – all human beings, all animals and plants – we all have a common belonging and we are all dependent on each other.”*

A Muslim pilgrim, in the Monastery of Deir Mar Musa in Syria, called this experience of interdependence ‘*the great US*’:

*“Here there is a strong feeling of being inclusive, the feeling of a great ‘US’ especially felt in the silence of liturgies, but also in different elements of prayer.”*

From Mexico comes an invitation to me through these few words:

*“The Benedictine monk should deep down in his conscious listening, walk bare-foot, as it were, through the world in order to be sensitive to everything and grateful for everything.”*

That is what I want to live in my daily life here at Sonnenhof. It is both demanding and simple at the same

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Marti, *Lichtspuren* ; Paulusverlag 2011 ; Freiburg - Schweiz

time. Simple, as a Japanese Benedictine monk explains:

*"We just live here, praying and working and being open to all those who come, who rest and who want to pray with us."*

Sr Christel.

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### A NEW START FOR SAINT ELISABETH

*The first half of this year, there were no sisters at Saint Elisabeth in Israel. We had given ourselves those few months to reflect and to prepare the new departure after the decision last year to do everything possible to continue our presence in the Holy Land, in this place where we have lived for nearly forty years. In choosing to send two sisters from the younger generation, we have taken a step of faith because losing two to go has its repercussions on the community as a whole.*

*Sr Dorothea and Sr Mechthild went at the beginning of October, and will from now on assume the life of the fraternity with Sr Maatje who will stay for a time to hand over to them.*

Throughout these months of discernment we have experienced so strongly that nothing belongs to us, we receive everything from God's hand. We had to give up our own desires and projects to enter God's call and to dare to say our 'Yes' in faith.

How can we not see the direct link between this departure and the theme of our Council meeting "***Towards a reconciled world***"? Is it not a call to live reality in this broken place that is the Holy Land? The date of our flight, the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, is also the date to

com-memorate the reunification of Germany. This is a sign of hope, inspiring in both of us who come originally from Germany an ardent prayer that one day these two peoples too will find a way opening up for them to share a land in justice and peace.

Our presence in this place opens us to love the people of the first Covenant, as well as the Palestinian people. May we be able to develop our sensitivity to the other who is different from ourselves. It all begins between us in our every day lives. It is firstly through faithfulness in prayer that we can dare to trust, to let our hearts be opened to incarnate our vocation for reconciliation in the little acts of each day. Our life will also be coloured by the welcome we find, and through all kinds of other encounters. And in this perspective of welcoming others we will also at the start, take time to learning the language.

Many friends in the village, in Jerusalem and in the Lutheran parish Church are expressing their joy at our return, a joy that we also share! But sometimes and even more just now, our hearts are torn and weighed down with so many tensions and sufferings in this land whose complex situation has hardened even more. How to be there and to persevere if not by abandoning ourselves to God's great love that carries us, and to his breath of goodness that urges us towards a horizon of hope?

Living in a place of fracture summarises, in a phrase, the heart of our vocation of reconciliation and unity.

A life of reconciliation ... God has given us a luminous witness to this, in the person of Brother Franz Muller o.p. He went to his Lord a short time after our Community meeting in February, but he will remain for us the brother who by his humanity, openness and the boldness of his faith, left his mark on our Community and supported it in its ecumenical vocation.

If God's Spirit of goodness is always nudging us to keep moving by welcoming more young people, for example, and by taking up new challenges and widening our horizons, he also gives us his faithful support. So it was with great gratitude that we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the religious profession of Sister Minke and Sister Danièle.

Yes there are times when God's breath of goodness is really perceptible! We feel it in so many encounters, in bonds of communion evident in your signs of friendship, of solidarity, of nearness and yours prayers. For us all this is always a cause for wonder and deep gratitude. Thank you !

May this Advent help us to prepare the way for the coming peace that God prepares for all peoples.

We remain close to you in this hope.

The Grandchamp Sisters.

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On the Website  
[www.grandchamp.org](http://www.grandchamp.org)  
you will find our programme for 2013,  
as well as our reading lists