

# NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2016



Some days are unforgettable, they count among special weeks and years. We have just lived through one of those days: it was the 18<sup>th</sup> September, the day on which Sister Pierrette handed over to me the ministry of unity, in a wonderful celebration! She passed on to me the cross she had worn for seventeen years, a cross surrounded by a circle with a dove at its heart, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the kindly breath of God, the Spirit of Communion.

There were about 400 people, with a big tent – a very big one – in the yard for this joyful and profound celebration, full of praise and listening. It was an image of the Church one and diverse, fervent and happy. And more than the Church, a part of reconciled humanity, a parable of communion. How can I express our gratitude to you all, our friends, brothers and sisters from so many communities and monasteries, and all of you that were present there in person or by your prayer? Without other people, what would we be? So, thank you to all of you who have accompanied us, upheld and helped us down the years, weeks and days that preceded that great celebration of friendship and joy and who continue with us into this new stage for the community! It really is beautiful and impressive! From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

*S. Anne-Emmanuelle*

## **Celebration on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2016: Echoes from a neighbour in the hamlet of Grandchamp**

The great day has arrived at last!  
Rather a dull day but at least no rain.  
The courtyard is filling gradually,  
people recognise each other – smiles  
and hugs all round. Our sisters, all in  
white, welcome everyone and seem to  
know each one.

In the tent at one end of the courtyard,  
people are taking their seats in rows  
of chairs placed so that all can have a  
good view of the three screens that  
will allow them to follow the  
ceremony in the Arch chapel.

We wait in silence – even the fountain  
is quiet! The sound of the bell marks  
the start. Then, oh what a treat,  
the sound of an oboe and a violin  
delights us for a few minutes. Sister  
Pierrette starts to speak and greets us  
and thanks the countless important  
people for making the journey and  
being present on this day, among  
these, members of Sister Anne-  
Emmanuelle's family.

Next the songs and praises of the  
liturgy, and the wonderful Gloria that  
never tires us. After Bible Readings in  
several languages surrounded by  
joyous Alleluias, followed the homily  
by Brother Alois.

In the silence for meditation, I notice a  
baby in the arms of its mother, three  
and half months old, who is wide-  
eyed, looking at our assembly. The  
baby kept quiet throughout, an  
innocent and fragile presence  
reminding us that the Lord draws out  
praise from little ones like this.

The Sisters who stood in the first row  
in the tent, went up to the Arch to  
take part in the liturgy of commitment.  
Brother Mark-Ephrem reminded us  
how the election of Sister Anne-  
Emmanuelle had taken place. We  
sang a hymn calling upon the Holy  
Spirit, before Sister Pierrette spoke  
again calling the future prioress to her  
mission. The whole Community got  
up to form a circle around the two of  
them. But in the tent, conscious of the  
solemnity of the moment, we  
remained so 'glued' to the screens that  
we did not even notice that we  
needed to stand up as well!

In a confident voice, Sister Anne-  
Emmanuelle promised by the grace of  
God to take on the role of prioress of  
the Community. After her promise  
came the welcome of the whole  
Community declaring: 'Yes we trust  
in the work of the Holy Spirit in you'.  
This moment of commitment was  
followed by a prayer to the Holy  
Spirit and the laying on of hands.  
Sister Pierrette passed on to the new  
prioress the cross that she herself  
worn for 17 years. We can only guess  
her emotions all through this liturgy  
of commitment, in passing on the role  
she had held for so many years to  
another sister, as the role was ending  
at this moment. Sister Anne-  
Emmanuelle went to sign her promise  
on the altar. It was with a background  
of music – with responses sung by the  
assembly then again with the oboe  
and the violin – that each sister  
welcomed the new prioress in her  
ministry of unity. The ceremony  
continued with the liturgy of the  
Eucharist.

At the end, we were offered refreshments at different places, a sumptuous buffet as varied as it was colourful and beautiful to look at. It was an opportunity to meet people, to share impressions and some met old friends. As the rain started again, it was in the tent an hour later that many return to dance to the sound of Israeli music, then a final, rhythmic 'Alleluia for the world'. I saw even the most elderly sister sitting near the dance floor beating time with her lively foot and clapping. It was such a beautiful celebration.

Anne Nussbaum

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### **Brother Alois' homily**

The presence of Brother Alois with three of his brothers for this important hand-over really touched and delighted us. Here are some extracts from his homily:

Dear Sister Anne-Emmanuelle, from now on you will be the servant of communion among your sisters, not at the head but at the heart of the community. Communion is a keyword at Grandchamp, as it is at Taizé. It is a question of a communion which opens out in many dimensions. Today I shall only mention four of them:

At its source, there is the personal communion with God and with Christ. In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of it with words on which we can meditate endlessly: 'Abide in my love!' The God of love invites us to live in simple communion with him, us in him and him in us, a communion nourished and renewed by the word

and by the Eucharist. That is the very centre of the vocation of the sisters of Grandchamp. (...)

Communion with God develops in a second dimension: that is the communion between sisters founded on mutual love. This is a priority. Without it a community might achieve magnificent work, but the sign of God's presence would be hard to see. (...)

It is in the attentiveness at every moment that communion is lived out, it is in everyday life that it also meets huge resistance. In a community, as in a family, one does not choose one's brothers and sisters. The community is a place where we must work to get over our resistance. If this cannot be done in a community how can it be done on a larger scale? (...)

The third dimension of communion is its missionary dimension. Many people take more notice of the witness of a community than that of an individual person. Brother Roger used to speak of 'a parable of community'.

A parable is a simple story that sends us to another dimension of reality. Every life consecrated to God and to the service of others can become a parable. In a world where many journey through life as if God did not exist at all, the fact that some men, women, or couples making a life-long commitment to Christ does pose a question. If Christ was not risen, these men, women and couples would not live in this way. Their life is a sign of Christ mysteriously present in the world.

More specifically, your community of Grandchamp and our community of

Taizé want to be small parables of the unity of Christians. What's more, by welcoming members from so many different origins our communities wish for the harmony of their common life to be a sign of communion among the different faces of the human family.

It is a difficult path and we must not let ourselves become paralysed. We must not be afraid of the other, not judge, not feel judged, not interpret things in negative ways and especially never refuse the communion of fellowship. All this sends us back to Christ: he alone can truly unite everything.

A last dimension to which your community is particularly sensitive is expanding the communion of all humankind especially with the poorest people. It is for a reason that on this day of national fasting, you have chosen this text from Isaiah: 'The fast that I prefer is it not to share your bread with the hungry?' How might we share Christ's hope with others, the hope that we ourselves draw from prayer, as we are faced with such immense poverty, injustice and threat of conflicts? (...)

Mercy and compassion are not only feelings, we need courage to go towards others, going beyond divisions and situations of distress that we encounter. We also need imagination to discover simple gestures of welcome and presence amongst the excluded and the poorest people. That, says Isaiah again, is when your light will rise in the darkness. (...)

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## **A view over this last year... and previous years**

Do you remember the themes of our newsletters these last years? Just to give you an idea, here are a few: 'Pilgrims of hope'; 'Daring to take the road to the future'; 'How do you see things?' Maybe you can hear the invitation to go forward 'with our eyes fixed on the One who goes before us on the road, as we go from one beginning to the next in untiring efforts'; always looking ahead. That is the meaning of our vocation. So why invite you to look back over past years? Well just so as to give thanks to God for what he has accomplished in our lives, in that of the community and of the Church. We give thanks for Sister Pierrette and what she has carried among us, for the fruitfulness of her ministry as prioress. This year indeed saw the election of a new prioress, the service of blessing and for that reason, preparations for change. Gathering up the beauty of what has been in our experience rather puts us into the position of the 'scribe, instructed in the kingdom of God, compared to a householder who brings from his store treasures new and old.' (Matt 13:52). How indeed to bring something new from a treasure we could not know?

From a distance some people think that the life of the sisters goes on like a long, quiet river but if it was like that, where would the life be in it? So how can we make the parable of community a reality together? How can we go forward in the confidence of faith towards the One who waits for us, as we discern his passing

through the multiple events of our daily lives?

For it is in the ordinary that life is woven and we find ourselves confronted by our own limitations and poverty: with our strength diminishing, advancing years, losses – amongst others that of Sister Minke – illnesses that are more or less disabling. Suddenly it becomes evident that we cannot carry on any more as we have been doing. There are decisions to be made, difficult decisions that cost us dear, for example, closing fraternities. But, as Sister Pierrette used to say to us, ‘limitations are not only a point beyond which we cannot go. They exist and must be respected. Accepted and integrated, they can become the place of creativity that comes to us from Another. The Spirit is at work and prepares the way for us; something new, unexpected and surprising can then start to grow.’

The things that have germinated or grown are the many links with so many communities and friends, widening of the group of volunteers at Grandchamp and of the people who come to help us from time to time; at Sonnenhof, it has been the creating of the ‘Freundeskreis’ and the beginning of a close partnership with Donat Oberson. A new dynamic is in place and the most recently arrived sisters and postulants are involved in this with us.

Caring for life, that means making sure our place is beautiful but keeping its simplicity too. In our hamlet work has been done to the buildings. Yes, they are getting older and from floors to ceilings, including walls, frontages

and roofs, they have been restored. Is that a parable? One about our receiving the life that is entrusted to us as new, whether our personal or our community life. ‘Letting the Holy Spirit conform our lives to that of Christ’; opening ourselves to his action in common praise – our psalter has seen a new edition, as has the office book, ‘Praise in all our Days at Grandchamp’ – and by opening ourselves by listening to the Word and taking care of our relationships. Yes, it is right there that the witness of the community becomes flesh: being witnesses together, through the whole of our life, of the mercy of God. ‘Happy the community that becomes an abyss of kindness’, wrote Brother Roger. Sister Pierrette used to underline the words ‘*that becomes*’. That is, we are and we remain on the move, all our lives! It is a journey on which Christ himself is committed to travel with us and tirelessly accompanies us. We can go forward in trust with a bold and joyful faith... It’s up to us to consciously join in the dynamic of mercy, which was the theme of our Council and of the retreat given by Brother Richard. Welcoming Christ’s presence in the acceptance of our differences, letting go of resentment, bitterness and a judgemental spirit and choosing to change direction as soon as these tendencies crop up; defusing violence beginning in ourselves; remitting all debts so that life can circulate. Not accumulating riches, whether they are material, spiritual, or psychological. In this extraordinary Jubilee year of mercy, called by Pope Francis, we choose to put aside everything that weighs down relationships, to keep hold of nothing... Without Christ this

is impossible, with Him it is a miracle, because he accomplishes it with us, through our yes. Down the years, from beginnings to beginnings, we have grown in a spirit of communion, in living together and for that we are endlessly grateful.

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### **One change leads to another**

The change of prioress has of course led to quite a few readjustments! To mention only the main ones: Sister Regina is now Sister Anne-Emmanuelle's assistant and Sister Gesine, who has come back from Sonnenhof, has taken on the responsibility of the noviciate – she is not out of work as five new postulants have arrived! Sister Dorothea has gone to Sonnenhof to help Sister Mechthild.

Unconnected to the change of prioress, there is also news from the Third Order of Unity. Since their meeting earlier this year, Lucette Woungly-Massaga is now responsible, helped by Sjouktje Hoeksema, from the Netherlands and by Evelyne Roulet from French-speaking Switzerland.

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### **A stay in Jerusalem**

It lasted the length of a tourist visa, it was an experience of ecumenical life together in Jerusalem and it could take place thanks to the generosity and courage of the Little Sisters of Jesus. This is how Sister Regina expresses her gratitude for this rich and intense experience:

This extract from the poem of Father Rafique Khoury, who lives in

Jerusalem, best expresses what this city means for our vocation of unity and of reconciliation. He is a great friend of the Little Sisters and I was able to meet him.

*"Jerusalem has taught me that I can only be human with other human beings, that I can only be a Christian with other Christians, that I can only be a believer with other believers.*

*Jerusalem has taught me that my identity is not a closed identity but an open identity, and that it is only complete if it is enriched by the identity of the other.*

*Jerusalem has taught me that the universal does not deny the particular and that the universal is what is capable of inviting to its table all the richness of the particular.*

*Jerusalem is the city of otherness par excellence but, in contrast, it is there too that otherness is most crucified and crucifying, in order to remind us that our project for a reconciled humanity is always incomplete, always inviting effort and spiritual combat."*

Jerusalem, the holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims is called from all time to become a holy city of peace. Borne by this promise, it becomes the perfect place for a possible education in peace, non-violence and reconciliation at the very heart of the conflicts and sufferings it goes through. In this small space of life, where all is there to be unified and yet where all is separated, how can we reach this peace if not with respect and welcome, in recognition of the other, especially the other who is different? What can help the victims of violence to start on a path of reconciliation? Help them to turn towards the place within themselves

where the well-spring of peace resides?

This spring wants to well up from the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to flow to all the corners of the planet.

For years, there have been in this country places where 'living together' is tested in a search for justice and security for all. Schools of peace have been founded, numerous initiatives have arisen inviting people to meet and to learn from one another to construct bridges of mutual understanding. In these places, it is principally a matter of listening to the suffering and fears of the other without repressing one's own. The solution to the conflict can only arise in the very place of conflict and through the people touched by the consequences of violence!

But then as a community, what does God expect of us? This question stayed in my heart all through my various and varied visits as I listened to the Little Sisters of Jesus who have lived in this country for so long, to their neighbours who are victims of the conflict, to the sisters of the Carmel of St Joseph who live in a little Druze village, to our friends of Saint Elisabeth, sisters and brothers of the monasteries and communities that we have known for a long time.

Father David Neuhaus, who lives in Jerusalem, asks this question: 'Should we follow that 'Man' who used always to say to his disciples: "Let's go, let's go to the other side, let's keep moving!" This dynamic mission of Jesus is truly a very important source of reflection.'

Are we not constantly called out of ourselves to live our vocation of unity and reconciliation in the midst of these tensions, to be present at the heart of conflicts in order to commit them to God, to go down to the common roots of the three monotheistic religions, and never to forget that we have the same Father? Shouldn't we keep on the move so as not to cling to a particular stance, capable of recognising the sufferings of both sides and if possible, bearing the pain with them? Are we called to go back to the Holy Land to Jerusalem, to create something new with other communities, a simple ecumenical presence of prayer, of communion with all? This is the question we hold in our prayer.

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## 2017...

It will be the 500<sup>th</sup> year since the Reformation. At the time of writing, Sister Anne-Emmanuelle and Sister Embla are preparing to go to Lund in Sweden for the ecumenical celebration of the start of this commemoration, which will bring together Catholics and Lutherans and in which Pope Francis will take part!

Will we know how to make this commemoration an opportunity to celebrate together *the Christ of communion*?

The churches present in the Canton of Neuchâtel are preparing for it. A celebration will bring together all the Christians of the region in the summer of 2017. They will unite in thanksgiving for the journey already made and for the gifts of the different

Churches, as well as uniting in asking God for forgiveness for all the obstacles put in the way of the path to unity and all will ask each other pardon for sufferings inflicted down the centuries. It is a pressing invitation to dare to take new steps on the path to visible unity.

*Passing from a commemoration of the confessions... to a birthday for the future,* such is the title of a conference that was given in Grandchamp by the Pastor Laurent Schlumberger, the president of the United Protestant Church of France.

Will the Church in all her diversity be able to enter into this dynamic, and thus open a way of hope for the world?

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*'Light of God, come and cover the earth...'* the earth of our hearts and all the earths that are dried out and thirsty for the truth, for reconciliation and for peace in our world! That is our prayer with you in our expectation and hope of Christmas!

We hope all of you will have a blessed Christmas season.

Your Sisters of Grandchamp



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