

*Blessed are the meek  
for they will inherit the earth*



NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2017

## *God wants us to be happy!*

The *yes* said by Mary, by a woman, changed the world. The *yes* of Sister Marguerite, more than 80 years ago, allowed the community to come to life. Mother Geneviève's *yes* and that of the first sisters who made profession, enabled the community to take root, develop and last. The same is true for us: my *yes*, our *yes*, your *yes* cannot but bring growth, a deepening and a flourishing of life. *Yes* to life as it comes, day after day. God desires to walk with us, though giving us our responsibility, our freedom to mobilise all our creativity to work with Him as true partners, as friends, beloved children. That is the sum of our dignity! Being open to his Spirit of kindness, to the Spirit of the Risen Christ who has overcome evil. How can we choose to listen to this Spirit, to turn to God, to our small inner voice, when the context of our world makes us afraid? It is an exercise for every day, for every moment, and indeed we need the testimony of other praying people to help us to persevere and to believe in the power of prayer. It is a wonderful solidarity! A prayer at all times: in doubt, in fear, in what is unacceptable, but also in joy. A 'prayer for all seasons'. A prayer in every "ecumenical" form: according to our cultures, confessions and religions...

That implies a constant struggle ever to choose anew to trust and to choose what leads to life. When we dare, it is powerful to experience how the breath of Life, the breath of God who created the world, is at work. No, our world has not been abandoned.

This leads us to our theme for this year: '*Blessed (happy) are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*' The combat of prayer leads us to non-violent resistance, to refusing to respond to evil with evil, but with prayer for our enemies and with the forgiveness that God gives us.

God wants us to be *happy*, It is not easy to accept joy and happiness. It is not selfish to be happy. Happiness always radiates further. It is easier to load oneself with the whole world's problems and to lament them, rather than to welcome the peace that the risen Christ gives us. Creation needs people who are at peace, happy to be alive. It's a matter of saying *yes* to life, to the breath of life that passes through us and dwells in us, to open ourselves to that life and let God be at work, so long as we have our hands empty, and are conscious of our poverty. Often we struggle against what life brings us.

'*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*' How has Christ, meek and gentle of heart, inherited the earth? He became incarnate in the full substance of our human condition in order to assume it in its entirety. Do we not also have to go deep down into ourselves in order to take on and consent to our own history, both personal and collective? Living within each of us

there is a child, an adolescent, an adult. How do we handle this 'co-habitation'? With gentleness or with bitterness? Are we still marked by rebellion, violence, regret, guilt, anger, fear, and anguish..? When we are aware of what is in us, we can open our selves to the Spirit. It is a spiritual combat that can stir up darkness and destructive forces. Yes, it's as in the hymn in Philippians chapter 2, the hymn of the incarnation: Jesus goes even to the cross and through death. That is how he inherited the earth, as we do in following him. He accepted to receive himself back from Another, that is, his Father. This trust even through death, leads him to the Kingdom by the power of the Spirit. Thus the earth becomes the Kingdom, extreme violence becomes gentleness, of the Breath of the Resurrection Spirit.

What is this *gentleness* or *meekness*? It is anything but sentimentality or passivity. On the contrary, it requires real inner strength, backbone, vital energy and determination to journey through all human weakness, through our fears of death and the worst of human suffering. It needs a process of forgiveness and reconciliation to transform our violence and darker side so as not to render evil for evil or pass on evil to others unwittingly - or sometimes even consciously - in order to live out the love of enemies, true non-violence. And to bless those who have done us evil we need the dering-do of the 'little girl hope' (Ch. Péguy). "Meekness is the fruit of the Spirit. It is patience, full of a passion for life. Meekness is active, it does not shirk from raising up, restoring and rebuilding. It means carrying each other's burdens and putting oneself in the place of the other to do that," as Brother Richard told us in the Counsel Retreat.

To be women and men who are happy, this is the way of incarnation we must follow! But is it possible? Yes, with boldness and the strength of one another's prayers that enable us to see life, always there, alongside *and* at the heart of the dramas of our own existence and of our world. We perceive what is germinating and growing and we watch over the new shoots, small and big, with love, kindness, wonder and gratitude. We ask constantly for this gift of the Spirit, the breath of life which transfigures our way of looking, and widens the spread of the Kingdom, of that Earth to be inherited, already there. That is the infinite depth of each moment.

Sœur Anne-Emmanuelle

2017

It is not easy to give a brief echo of a year that has been so full, marked by new beginnings as well as by continuity. A new beginning with the new prioress, and continuity in the changes and movements within the community.

From the start of her time as prioress, Sr Anne-Emmanuelle has stressed the power of spiritual combat, and that has been good for us and has allowed us to cope with energy and creativity with a daily programme that was sometimes very heavy.

For our winter meeting we had chosen to deepen our knowledge of orthodoxy and we began the theme with the subject of 'the combat of prayer'. Irina Brandt led us into the subject with great feeling and sensitivity by telling us of the testimony of believers who had lived through terrible ordeals in the camps at the time of communism in Romania. She told us how these witnesses to the faith had been able to hold out under torture and suffering by prayer, and by their certainty that others were praying for them.

Shortly before our meeting we had had the privilege of hearing a present-day witness who told us what he had experienced in Syria. Father Jacques Mourad shared with us how prayer had sustained him during his captivity after he was taken by Daesh. Before us was a man of peace. He was already a man of peace before his capture, bringing to Muslims and Christians alike the humanitarian aid that they needed and urging them not to take up arms. That was always the approach at the Mar Moussa Monastery in Syria, where he joined Father Paolo dall'Oglio. Father Mourad introduces himself as a man who has trusted his life to God and receives everything from God. Being

close in his spirituality to Father Charles de Foucault, he has been carried by de Foucault's prayer: '*Father I abandon myself into your hands...*' and by the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila: '*Let nothing disturb you or dismay you...*' and by praying the Rosary; he perceived the presence of Mary walking with him. With his inner freedom, on which he insists a great deal, he received Peace. He became free of all hate, keeping his gaze fixed on the words of Jesus: '*pray for those who persecute you.*' He was comforted by the idea that he was sharing something of the sufferings of Christ. He knew he was weak, and yet he was given the strength to bear all the ill-treatment and cruelty by these words that stayed with him: '*My grace is sufficient for you: my strength is made perfect in weakness.*' (2 Cor 12:9)

We found the theme of the Council this summer: '*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*' as a follow-up to the theme of spiritual combat. Brother Richard developed it in the retreat, speaking of the necessity to pass through violence to attain a gentleness that is both strong and disarmed, and that is indeed the combat of prayer.

We had no big decisions to take this time in the Council so we had time to listen to each other, to listen for example to our two sisters from the Czech Republic who spoke of their country, their churches; to listen to our three sisters who have started their life in a small fraternity in a flat in COLOMBIER not far from Areuse; to listen to Sr Janny who since last autumn has been living an ecumenical experience in the Netherlands at CATHARINAHOF, a house which welcomes monks and nuns in retirement; to listen to Sr Christianne and her life at WOUDSEND with Maria de Groot, listen to Sr Gabrielle and all

that she is experiencing at the FOYER-HANDICAP; listening too to the sisters who had lived at the fraternity in LOMME. This bold adventure which began in December 2010 unfortunately came to an end in its present form this July. But we have no doubt that it will continue to bear fruit. Sr Marie-Geneviève, Oblate sister of the Eucharist shares her experience:

*“Living together, always seeking true communion in daily life, led me to try to see better the depths and sensitivities of the other confessions, and invited me to further deepen the treasures of my own Catholic faith. That is a real discovery. Without doubt the true reality of ecumenism. For me it is exactly there that we put our ecumenical mission into practice, in faith.”*

We also took time to share about our ecumenical vocation.

## **2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation**

From the opening at Lund (Sweden) on 31<sup>st</sup> October last year, this has been the occasion for many ecumenical events, celebrations, exhibitions... and we got involved in many ways.

Here in Grandchamp, in the week of prayer for Christian unity, we had the joy of welcoming the monks and nuns of French-speaking Switzerland for a time of sharing around the theme of reconciliation and the vocation of unity; a very joyful and profound meeting!

We were involved in the preparation of the ecumenical celebration in the Canton of Neuchatel on 20th August. Sr Pierrette and Sr Elisabeth were particularly active in the planning and the celebration.

As long ago as December 2015 about a dozen people representing the different

Christian confessions in the Canton met for the first time in Grandchamp, on the initiative of Sr Pierrette and Heiner Schubert from the Don Camillo community in Montmirail. Their main concern was to experience the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in an ecumenical context, celebrating the Christ of communion and together thank God for the gifts placed in each of the different churches. The group set about listening to one another's sensitivities, and they met about every three months. Gradually a project took shape: to invite people to a Canton-wide ecumenical celebration on Sunday 20th August. Much care was put into dialogue and engaging together and being creative - and what creativity! The magnificent celebration brought about 400 people together. Some of the highlights:

° The prayer of repentance: through a symbolic gesture we dipped every one of our requests for forgiveness into the water of Baptism

° The 5 commitments made by the assembly and the fact that we are all invited to take them up and put them into practice.

The whole celebration was filled by joyful and whole-hearted praise, well expressed in the JUBILATE DEO sung at the end!

## **Beyond the borders of our Canton**

Sr Hannah, Sr Elisabeth and Sr Miriam were able to go to Zoug for the national one-day meeting bringing together Catholic and Reformed churches for a double celebration: the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation and the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Nicolas de Flue. The day ended with an ecumenical celebration led by Mgr Felix Gmur, Bishop of Basel, and the Rev Gottfried Locher, chair of the Federation of Protestant churches in Switzerland.

Sr Regina and Sr Dorothea took part in the Kirchentag in Berlin; Sr Regina and Sr Pascale in the ecumenical celebration in Berne; Sr Pascale was at a conference on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation held in Bose...

May all that has been shared and seeds sown in these meetings and in many others, bear fruit in abundance and help us to live the Gospel ever more faithfully.

### **Among other missions connected to our ecumenical vocation**

° Once again Sr Michèle and Karin Seethaler were able to accompany an international ecumenical group in the Contemplative Exercises at Auschwitz, in Poland. The Contemplative Exercises are a form of retreat in which Grandchamp and Karin have collaborated for 15 years now! Through 10 days of silent prayer together the participants experienced an intense journey to life and reconciliation.

° Several sisters took part in inter-confessional and international meetings of women and men in consecrated life in Prague, in Schwanberg in Germany, and in Versailles. Going forward with other sisters and brothers in continuity through the annual or two-yearly meetings is very precious and stimulating. Similarly, with the members of Church and Peace who had their General Assembly this year in Strasbourg.

° Two sisters attended the meeting 'Protestants celebrating' in Strasbourg.

### **As days go by**

Daily life is and always will be our great exercise ground! Working at our relationships is still a challenge especially in situations where we feel vulnerable and overwhelmed. We know

that the way to unity begins within each one of us and between ourselves.

A climate of goodwill and mutual aid really helped us to cope with all this year's changes and internal reorganisation. And we had the joy of welcoming several young sisters who come from Sweden, the Netherlands, Latvia, the Czech Republic and from Geneva. They bring us their rich cultural and ecclesiastical traditions, and their freshness and energy.

Another gift was that of the presence of the Rev Richard Mikpedo from Benin, a member of the Third Order of Unity, who spent four months with us preparing for his retreat ministry in the Protestant Methodist Church in Benin.

Sr Pierrette and Sr Siong were able to long last to enjoy a sabbatical time - each in very different ways. Sr Pierrette who had some previous commitments to fulfil first, only started her sabbatical in mid-August. Sr Siong was able to enjoy hers fully, though it was interrupted by her month's stay in Madagascar with our sisters in Mamre, sharing with them various retreats and teaching, but also the challenges and troubles of a glorious country which is passing through great difficulties at present.

### **In Sonnenhof**

The main building work done in 2016 - the new kitchen and laundry needed big investments of money and effort - but what a lightening of the work load! The sisters are very happy about it. If the experiment at a form of partnership with Donat Oberson has not been able to continue, the experience remains positive and clear, all the same. There were many guests at Sonnenhof during these last few months, and the end of the year will be marked by the Taizé meeting in Bâle! The six sisters who at

present live at Sonnenhof receive a great deal of support, both practical and financial, from the members of the Freundeskreis for whom this presence in German speaking areas is so important, as the Rev Richard Haug said:

*“If I reflect on what draws me to Sonnenhof, it is above all the midday prayer: some or all of the Beatitudes are recited or sung: ‘Happy are the poor in spirit, for the Kingdom of heaven is theirs...’*

*The Spirit of Jesus speaks to us directly in the beatitudes. I feel there that what is narrow becomes broad, and what is heavy becomes lighter. The life of the world appears in a new light. The beatitudes infuse the lives of the sisters outside midday prayer as well. Each morning they recite a summary of the Rule as a watchword for the day: ‘Pray and work so God will reign (...) Be filled with the spirit of the beatitudes joy, simplicity, mercy.’*

*It would be false to claim that this spirit of the beatitudes only concerns the sisters who have adopted the Rule of Taizé. The sisters in fact make us, as their guests, participate in the true meaning of the beatitudes: they are not meant for the perfect or the specialists. That is evident in the 4th of the beatitudes, for example: ‘Happy those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled.’ It is not the righteous who are blessed, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This hunger and thirst is always conveyed in the liturgy through the intercessory prayer.*

*The spirit of the beatitudes inspires me also when I go down from the heights of Sonnenhof to return to my daily life. These days where all domains of life seem to be accelerating, Sonnenhof and*

*Grandchamp are unique as places where the sisters try to live this spirit in their daily lives: joy, simplicity, mercy. Without these places and their influence, not only Switzerland but the whole German-speaking world would be the poorer.”*

## **In our Spiritual family**

Some wonderful links are woven in communion and friendship among the various groups of the Third Order of Unity at their annual meeting, at their language groups and when members make their life promises. At Grandchamp three members of the group from the Netherlands made life promises in the spring and three from French-speaking Switzerland at the French retreat in the autumn. It was with gratitude and feeling that we thought of Klara Kunzler, who died in September. She was in charge of the Order of Unity from 1999 to 2010, and carried her responsibility with all her heart, and had the joy of receiving the first promises of the members from Benin, ten years ago.

Huge gratitude for Véronique Laufer too, who was close to the Order of Unity and to the Community; she left us in October; we felt gratitude for her love of life, her faithful and generous friendship, her many commitments and her infectious faith. Her mother, Hélène Laufer, was with Geneviève Micheli one of the ‘Ladies of Morges’; they were together at the start of the adventure of spiritual retreats that was at the origins of our community.

The Servants of Unity met in Sonnenhof in February and in Grandchamp for their annual session in the summer. They worked with the theme of Reconciliation which followed naturally on from that of last year ‘the Our Father.’

Our spiritual family is not confined to the Third Order of Unity and the Servants of Unity and the Foyers d'Unité...

An immense family which links us deeply with so many people. Among others Simone Pacot who lived her passover in the spring. She was for us a huge gift, a precious friend, a witness to life in the Spirit and the founder of the Bethesda sessions, 'Evangelisation of the depths', a path of inner unification and humanisation, this journey well signposted by the rules of life has been and remains a source of blessing for many of us, for the community and for all the people who have followed and still follow a Bethesda course.

Even more broadly speaking, we are of course filled with wonder as we think of the whole network of friendship and prayer, of all those who can now join us in our prayer times through the internet, - the grace of a communion which draws us all further on life's way.

And what would we be without your acts of solidarity, your generosity, your trust, your prayer, which allow us to continue our way? A very big thank you to each one of you, particularly to all our volunteers, helpers and employees.

May the God of hope guide our steps, the steps of our world in the way of peace all through this new year. We wish you a blessed Christmas.

The Sisters of Grandchamp



Grandchamp 4, CH - 2015 Areuse

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