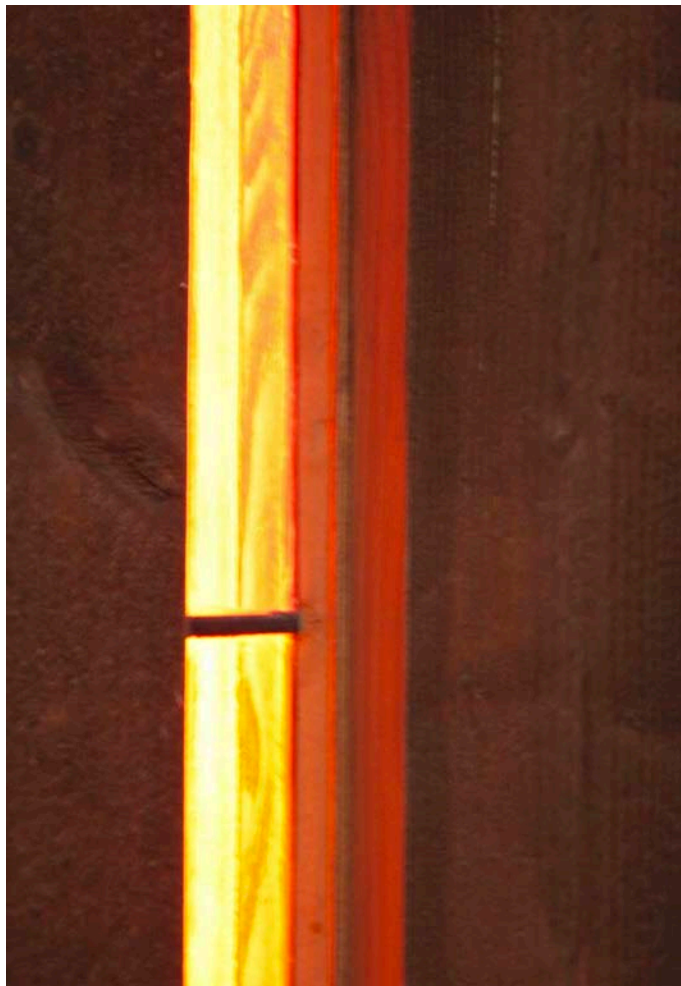


*The unknown:  
cradle of the new*



GRANDCHAMP NEWSLETTER 2020

## *From the Gift of Time to a Time Fully Lived*

*'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit.'* This is the theme chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021. The World Council of Churches invited our community to choose the theme and to draft a proposal. Together we worked out a trajectory of prayer on the basis of John 15:1-17. We cannot bear fruit on our own. We cannot bear fruit separated from the vine. It is the sap, the life of Jesus flowing through us, that produces fruit. Abiding in Jesus's love, remaining a branch of the vine, is what allows his life to flow in us. Little did we know that we were approaching a time where we would be confronted with the heart of this reality.

Sister Gesine relates how the present moment plunges us into the unknown opens us up to things new:

The lockdown brought everything to a full stop: we were unable to welcome guests, pursue our projects, or plan anything ... It all came to a standstill. Just like everyone else, we were suddenly faced with the unknown. In Psalm 46, God invites all of humanity to *'Be still and know that I am God'*. Is this not what is at stake in our time? To transform a standstill – a forced lockdown – into a time that hopes and waits for God, a time that calls us to dwell in God's love? The unknown can then become a cradle of something new – although this is quite difficult when the encounter with the vulnerability and unpredictability of life arouses existential fear in us.

*'Living in the Present Moment with God: From the Gift of Time to a Time Fully Lived'* this was the theme for our Council in 2020. What does it mean but to live to the fullest all that is given, to listen to the One who gives us every moment? Brother Adalberto Piovano, an Italian Benedictine, emphasised this in the retreat he gave in February. *'Seeing time as a gift enables us to live it, not as a matter of luck or fate – on the contrary, it moves our life into that gratuitous space of God's love for us ... if time is always a gift, then we can learn to receive it continually, with the patience of one who knows how to welcome each day, and with the trust of one who knows how to wait for tomorrow.'*

Patiently welcoming today with its unknowns, confident that there is a tomorrow. Sister Anne-Emmanuelle said in her introduction to our Council: *'There is an attitude to be learnt from the experience of Covid 19: that of not knowing. Time does not belong to us, is not in our hands. That implies first and foremost opening up to something greater than ourselves, to the breath of the Spirit that fills the universe, to God's creative work with us. No need to pretend we know everything, or have ready-made solutions at hand. The appropriate attitude is to welcome reality as it is, and to know how to be open to the unexpected where the Spirit of holiness, of God, is at work. It means taking the time to truly accept our limitations, our fragilities, our vulnerability, without hiding them. As we open them to the Breath of God, they become sources of creativity, because we work together and live in a covenantal relationship with God.'*

That implies a conversion. 'Metanoia', the Greek word, implies thinking ahead, going 'above and beyond'. It means relying upon the active strength of God who wants to create something new with us. We have touched on something of this mystery during this period where we are unable to celebrate the Eucharist. At first we felt a painful loss, an emptiness. How could we live an extended time without this essential nourishment? But in the moments of silent prayer before the empty cup and paten that we introduced in place of communion, many experienced a fullness: the fullness of the presence of God that is not limited to particular expressions, a fullness of God's presence in the body of the faithful gathered together; the fullness too of a unity of all Christians. Indeed, were not all Christian traditions more united in their common need than in a shared Eucharistic communion which is not (yet) possible?

This year we were given a little tree with a remarkable history: it grew from the seed of a tree that survived the bomb at Hiroshima. All around the world these 'trees of peace' are growing, powerful symbols of how seeds can survive and grow given the right conditions. We received it from a Dutch friend of the community who has an extraordinary story of her own: as a child she survived a Japanese concentration camp in Indonesia. Her life is a testimony to the service of reconciliation. Two life paths that appeared headed for disaster and were beset by great unknowns, have now become bearers of life.

The world is preparing to live through a new year with many open questions. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will also require a lot of creativity and attentive listening. In the introduction to the week, we wrote: *'Although we, as Christians, abide in the love of Christ, we also live in a creation that groans as it waits to be set free (cf. Rom 8). In the world we witness the evils of suffering and conflict. By our solidarity with those who suffer we allow the love of Christ to flow through us. The paschal mystery bears fruit in us when we offer love to our brothers and sisters and nurture hope in the world.'*

Reality, O how timely! May all Christians be united together in waiting, hoping, and listening for whatever new paths might open up as we pass through the unknown. Together they will bear fruits that God is already preparing.

*Desiring to renew the spiritual foundation of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus proposed that our community prepare the texts for its celebration of the Week in 2021:*

Those who pray for the divine gift of unity in Christ and seek ways to make it visible, will be delighted that this prayer of Grandchamp will make its way around the world twice in 2021.

Allow me to explain. Each year the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church, through the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, publish resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Father Paul Couturier, a pioneer of the Week of Prayer, was a friend of Grandchamp from its beginnings.

The resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are first used in January (18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>) each year, when the week is celebrated in the northern hemisphere. They are then used again in the week leading up to Pentecost in some countries of the southern hemisphere, such as Brazil.

In 2018 the WCC and Catholic Church invited the sisters of Grandchamp to prepare the biblical meditations and prayers for 2021, which was to be the year for the next world assembly of the WCC.

The WCC had already chosen the theme for the next assembly: 'the love of Christ leads the world to reconciliation and unity'. The sisters chose their own theme for the 2021 prayers before they had heard the theme for the assembly. It fit perfectly: 'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit', from chapter 15 of John's Gospel.

Ecumenism, in the sense of the visible manifestation of the gift of unity in Christ, is nourished by the charisms that the churches and christian communities

receive from the Holy Spirit, beyond and despite their persistent divisions. They are called to share these gifts. An ecumenism that is not nourished by a spirituality of unity soon encounters disillusion, and even hostility to any search for visible unity.

From it's the time of its founding the Community of Grandchamp received the gift, the charism, of prayer for unity and a ministry in service of unity. Ecumenism belongs to our DNA. The spiritual ecumenism of Grandchamp, that has matured through the experience of trials in the last century and in recent years, is even more necessary now, because the path to unity is proving longer and more demanding these days than it was in the past.

As a result of the global crisis in 2020, the WCC Assembly has been postponed to 2022. It will take place not far from the French and Swiss borders in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 31<sup>st</sup> August to 8<sup>th</sup> September. It is to be an assembly where churches and peoples seek to replace the edification of walls that divide by the building of bridges, places of encounter, reconciliation, and unity.

This means that Grandchamp's prayers for unity in 2021 will encourage us to pursue the path of unity in 2022, and beyond.

Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus  
Deputy General Secretary of the  
World Council of Churches

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*Bearing witness to hope for new pathways ahead: Sr Irmtraud and a friend of the community:*

A new hope has inspired me since March: hope that the lockdown might help to bring about structural change worldwide, with greater respect for the whole of creation and the survival of the planet.

The lockdown might be compared to the experience of Moses in the desert after killing the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11 ff). In this solitude, God revealed himself to Moses and entrusted to him the liberation of the Hebrews from their slavery. At the same time, he learned what he would later need to lead the people for all those years through the desert.

If the Hebrew people were able to leave Egypt after all the horrors they had experienced, before entering the promised land, they would still need to learn to change their mindset in order to live as free people. They learned that lesson through the crossing of the desert.

The lockdown has given us, and many other people, the joy of breathing cleaner air, a sense of gratitude for local food, for silence, for a deeper listening. Could this be a way of preparing us to seek a richer, simpler lifestyle, a greater solidarity? With the eyes of faith, and trusting that God in his love is with humankind in all their different situations, surely we can already see the seeds of another way of life starting to grow, a simpler, greener life? It is vital that this change reaches the structures that cause injustice and that prevent people living together peaceably.

Will the events that are shaking Belarus, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Ecuador and many other countries bring about a new awareness that can lead to transformation, 'metanoia', both on a personal and a social level?

Let us support by our prayer those who are today's 'Moses', that they may hold firm and that change may come about as peacefully as possible.

Together with all those who pray, no matter what their religion, we are all called to keep alive the hope of a dignified life for all people and for the whole

of creation, so that God's kingdom will come, striving to live what is already possible. Our task is to live in the bond of love and trust with the Source of all life. May that prayer allow all the forces of the planet to be purified and set free to grow towards that time when God will be all in all.

Sister Irmtraud

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### Weaving a new being together

*'Jesus said: Blessed is the one who has suffered. He has found life.'*

*Gospel of Thomas, logia 58.*

We are passing through a major collective crisis. It affects us individually as I have observed in my consultations. The fear of death and of economic collapse are constantly in mind with destabilising effect. As with all true crises, this is at once both fearsome and fascinating. Fear and pain are there, but also, undoubtedly, opportunities. Many people tell me their priorities have changed during this time, how they have begun to listen to what is essential in themselves and found the space to encounter their inner selves. Relationships with others have also been thrown into crisis. There have been, and still are, examples of coming together - through trials shared in common through lockdown with those dearest to us, or through increased contacts by internet. And then there is the pain of being apart, of social-distancing and all the rules banning meetings, leading to a sense of isolation, sometimes very strong, especially from the groups and communities to which we belong.

It seems to me that for many of us the crisis provokes a double interior movement: a return into ourselves on the one hand, to one's own intimate self, by way of a unique personal space; on the other hand, we are rediscovering our relation-

ships with others in a new way. Even though being together as we knew it has become rare and precious, a kind of internalization of our relationships through being better heard and more fully accepted in our distinctiveness is now possible. In our communities, connections have also shifted. The usual outward gestures that were part of our 'being together' have been, and still are, impossible - forcing us to rely on our inner resources, yet leading us at the same time to depend on others in a more intimate way. Drawing from our interiority, it is perhaps easier to get in touch with who we really are and to find our place in community with greater serenity and freedom. This can also help us to give others their rightful place. When this happens, it certainly leads to a new experience of community, to communities that can then better cope with diversity and otherness, while living the experience of the deep bonds interwoven between all, making them signs of a new kind of unity.

This inner experience with those close to us, or within the groups we belong to, could be extended on a broader scale. Does this crisis not concern the whole of humanity? Through the news about Covid that comes to us from all parts of the world, our close connection with the world and our solidarity with so many people everywhere, can we experience a growing sense of belonging to this human family. If this is so, we might be pass through the same steps of the process on this larger scale: first to be more honest with ourselves; then to recognize our unique, legitimate and proper place within the whole of humanity; then, to recognize the place of all others, in their essential otherness, their own truth, without seeking to exercise power over them; and finally, from there to weave the inner fabric that joins us to others, holding us together in that entity that is

humanity. There we will touch the human family in its infinite diversity and evident unity. In the drama of this period that we are now living through, may we be given a thread with which to weave a *new being together*.

Thierry, Doctor and Therapist

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### ***Many different times have marked our life at Grandchamp***

*'There is a time for everything and a season for all things under the sun'*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1*

***Retreat times:*** a retreat in February with Brother Adalberto, and another in August with Brother Richard from Taizé. Brother Richard spoke of 'the time of fulfilment', times that endure and allow seeds to grow, times of anguish, and finally, time opening up to eternity as in the Transfiguration or the appearances of the Risen Christ.

***Meeting times,*** with witnesses like Serge Molla who spoke to us about Martin Luther King; Isabel Barros, from Brazil, who is researching Switzerland's colonial past; and Ulrich Duchrow who is passionate about economic justice in our world, in particular through *Kairos Palestine*.

HJ Lim, a virtuoso pianist from Korea, delighted us with her music. She gave several concerts for us in the Jubilé Room, at times accompanied by her Buddhist master. The power of her music seemed almost to transfigure time!

Brother Charles-Eugène from Taizé, who in an insightful and richly evocative way spoke to us about Brother Roger, an important witness in the Church and in the World.

We had the great joy of welcoming four sisters from the Mamre Community in Madagascar for a month-long visit; as

well, several novices from the Community of Bose and their Novice Mistress joined us for a few days.

***Times to come home to Grandchamp and times to go out to encounter others:*** Sister Jutta and Sister Monique left Colombier and returned to Grandchamp, and Sister Anneke has rejoined us here after having spent several years at Sonnenhof. Sister Birgit and Sister Gesine had the joy of attending the annual Taizé meeting in Wrocław. Sister Dana spent a month with the Cistercian community in Cabanoule in the south of France.

***Times living together in Grandchamp and times living away:*** listening to each other in order that the quality of our relationships is ever more central for us, so that we live well together and are able to extend a peaceful welcome to our guests.

Sister Janny and Sister Christianne with Maria de Groot in the Netherlands, Sister Gabrielle in the home for people with physical disabilities 'Foyer Handicap', Sister Anne-Genevieve and Sister Hiltje in a Residential care home: each one lives out her specific vocation of prayer in the service of unity within the human family. Thanks to regular times of sharing with the rest of the community, we are all enriched.

***At Sonnenhof,*** the praise of God both carries and unites the small group of sisters. It has given them the flexibility to live through challenges like illness, the departure of an employee, and through the lack of guests during the pandemic. They are encouraged by the renewal of the Freundeskreis and the Stiftungsrat (support groups of friends and volunteers), as they are by the creative spirit that strengthens their life together. They constantly express their gratitude for all the help and friendship that surrounds them.

***Times of newness:***

– A big change and an important milestone: Pastor Jean-Philippe Calame will succeed Pastor Jean-Louis L'Eplattenier in his ministry as chaplain to the Grandchamp community. Jean-Louis has been a friend of the Community since his student days at the Faculty of Theology in Neuchatel and has accompanied us faithfully as chaplain since 1986. We are deeply grateful for his discreet and attentive presence, for his gift of listening that always goes to the heart of things, his discernment, his availability for so many celebrations, and, of course, for his friendship. We look forward to journeying with Jean-Philippe.

– A lot of liturgical creativity enabled us to live for three months without celebrating the Eucharist, intensifying our prayer and finding new ways of experiencing our Easter and Pentecost retreats, which actually brought together a large number of people through the Internet.

– The joy of seeing the publication of Sister Françoise's new book: 'Aux invités de la vie' (For the guests of life).

***Time when life draws to a close:***

\* The sisters first met Father Boris Bobrinskoy since 1965-1967, when he worked at the Faculty of Theology in Neuchatel. The community offered him a place to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and several sisters had the privilege of participating as part of the 'small choir'. This was a wonderful opportunity that introduced them to the richness and added dimension found in the Orthodox liturgy.

\* Reverend Philippe Bécholey who, with his wife Anne, often led retreats at Grandchamp, especially for the Third-Order of Unity that they supported from its beginnings....

\* Reverend Peter Rüesch, who accompanied the sisters at Sonnenhof during many years.

\* Hans-Ruedi Weber, a long-time friend who enriched us greatly through his bible studies, and his openness to other cultures.

...These and many others close to the community who have died in the past year...

*Time for welcoming guests and a time for staying in touch despite the distance*, notably with the Third- Order of Unity. Even though the Colloquium was not able to meet, a retreat at the end of October allowed us to celebrate Sylvie Hauser's commitment.

The Servants of Unity were unable to gather at Grandchamp for their annual 'session' in July, but joined one another 'virtually' around the theme 'In Covenant with God, welcome the real that unfolds as a promise of life' - at the same time they discovered the wonders of video-conferencing!

Several group meetings and retreats had to be postponed till a later date. It remains a difficult time of discernment, one that requires a willingness to adapt on the part of everyone.

*Time to give thanks* for God's faithfulness and for the support of so many friends and relatives. We have been particularly touched by the signs of solidarity we received during lockdown. A huge thank you to each and every one of you!

Christmas is fast approaching. Through all the uncertainty that the world is going through, Christ comes to us as a new-born babe bringing infinite hope.

May his presence fill you with joy and stay with you throughout the new year.

The Sisters of Grandchamp



Grandchamp 4, CH - 2015 Areuse

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