

*Rooted in
God's Covenant*



GRANDCHAMP NEWSLETTER
2022

Let us celebrate God's covenant, living it as a gift for ourselves, humanity and all of creation

This is the theme we were given to accompany us this year.

In our current world context (wars; health, energy, and climate crises; abuse in the Church...), we are thus called not only to watch for signs of God's active presence – flowers of the almond tree – but, even more, to shift our focus to the gift of God's covenant and to celebrate it.

This means returning to the Source, rediscovering the foundation of our personal, community, global and cosmic life: an unfailing, eternal covenant, sealed with the creation of the universe, like our coming into the world. *"It is a disposition to be life-giving, a promise of life,"* Brother Richard of Taizé told us during our retreat. *A commitment by God!* It's not just about living this reality but celebrating it, entering into a dynamic of gratitude and praise, as with a birth! The covenant with God is special: his love is always first, unconditional and offered to everyone: *"The grandeur and the risk of our lives is to be thus called to awaken the joy of God by the quality and generosity of our response"* (P. Rondet), as each covenant requires a free response on both sides.

This choice, therefore, calls us and empowers us. The life of a couple, for example, requires concessions, rethinking, attention to the other that goes beyond words. *"Making a covenant, in Hebrew, is expressed as 'cutting a covenant'. Of course, the covenant joins the two contracting parties but also separates and distinguishes them, cutting them apart. There is no union without respect for differences."* (Armand Abecassis)

If that is what the covenant is, for it to continue to exist between God and human beings and among humans as well, we cannot just do whatever we like. We need reference points, beacons, so that life unfolds in a way that adjusts to the relationship to God, oneself, others and creation.

This is not easy, however, precisely because we are human. As we can easily see throughout history, the human person finds it difficult to live the quality of relationship that the covenant requires. He or she wants to be independent, to run his or her life without communicating with the other/Other!

As a result, trust is broken, and the ability to listen to the other is changed. This often results in things being left unsaid and misunderstandings that can ruin lives, even generations, and keep people living in fear.

Fear was the first emotion expressed by the human person to God, who asked him: *"Where are you?" – "I was afraid!"* Adam and Eve were afraid because they had not abided by the covenant. *"Blessed differentiation,"* as Lytta Basset put it, speaking of Pentecost. This is the sword that Jesus brought to separate, to unmerge. Being different from one another in relationship is not easy, because we are afraid of, anxious about, difference! But it ensures the necessary interdependence for a freely lived covenant.

It is madness, the madness of love, the risk God took in creating us as other, human. God wants for us this free relationship that gives our lives direction: always becoming more than we are, his beloved sons and daughters, and co-creators. This freedom does not spare us from suffering, injuries, the cross.

Daring to face our crosses means saying yes to our human, fragile nature. Conflicts, at the personal, familial, community and global level, are inherent to our condition, but it is only insofar as we consent to it – which does not happen without spiritual struggle –

that an unsuspected power of life is released, spreads out and is at work. Because if we experience this inner transfiguration, it will radiate outward, often without us knowing it. Almost indirectly, each person, wherever they are, thus contributes to the development of a more free world, in relationships that are always more true, more authentic and, ultimately, more human, as Jesus experienced. So, yes, we live as inheritors of this gift of the covenant, and we reflect it...

"Everything is connected, everything is given, everything is fragile," said Elena Lasida, speaking of integral ecology. The covenant can be lived out if it rests on these four pillars: relationship with God, with oneself, with others, and with creation, out of a desire for unity and balance. When we realize to what extent everything is connected, God and humanity, the world above and the world below, humans and creation, we realize that there is a universal unity of brotherhood, sisterhood. At the same time, we know that everything is fragile. Human beings have experienced this since birth. They know what it is to want, to need the other. That is what allows humans to be open to the vulnerability of their neighbour. In this way, we are called to take care of each other and together to care for life from beginning to end.

I remain in this awareness so that when I root myself in God's covenant, I am free to want the best for the other so that he or she also reconnects with this Source. Brother Alois of Taizé wrote: *"The interdependence of all living things makes us realize that we are, in a way, sisters and brothers of all beings."* Is not the current world crisis also an invitation for a necessary return to the Source, for which we were created?

Sister Anne-Emmanuelle

Awaken God's joy by answering God's call. What a wonderful thing! Each person can discover their own way of caring for life.

Here are a few echoes, connected to our spiritual family:

Eight people made a commitment to the Third-Order of Unity: from Benin: Mathieu, Nathanaël and Nicodème; from the Netherlands: Jeannette, Albertine, Cécile, Wim and Annie. Cécile expresses in her own words what this covenant means for her:

He's got the whole world in his hands

On 26 June 2022, I made a commitment in the Third-Order of Unity (TOU) with four other Dutch postulants. What a blessing and a joy to share this personal life choice during the retreat and the process of our commitments.

When I announced my desire to become a member of TOU two years ago, I wanted to make a commitment as quickly as possible. I had known Grandchamp for 20 years, including as a volunteer. I felt ready. But the process ended up taking longer because of the pandemic. That opened up a new, broader perspective on my commitment. What began as my personal and individual desire to reconnect with the sources of my faith and my personal relationship with God became a deepening of the communion with the communities I belong to: TOU, my family, my work and the Church. I realized how interrelated all these aspects of my life were.

My African Episcopal Methodist Church, since it began, has been engaged in the fight against slavery and oppression of Black people in the United States. As in South Africa, the country of my spouse, the reconciliation process involved a high level of awareness of the connection between social inequality and individual suffering. We place special importance on interaction between the pastor and the assembly, with an emphasis on expressions of joy and personal testimonies. Everything in creation is connected:

*He's got the whole world in his hands.
He's got the sun and the rain in his hands.
He's got all of us in his hands.*

At Grandchamp, silence and gentleness have an important place in the common praise. The form varies, but it also emanates a healing and peaceful effect.

How can we, in our communities, make room for the other's point of view? In my field of work, education, we talk about 'creating a safe space,' where we consciously make space for less dominant relationships. This opens up a kind of community that is supportive and equal.

Rooted in my personal sources, and aware that we are all brothers and sisters who are part of creation, I hope - with you - to continue to grow in a supportive community.

Cécile

The *Servants of Unity*, because of the lack of new women joining, were preparing for the end of their group. Then several young women contacted them during COVID, called by this life focused on prayer and lived in celibacy, while remaining connected to a group. During their gathering this summer, there were four new women present!

Here is how the theme of covenant resonates with two SUs:

- I would like to share a concrete action that for me adorns the celebration of the covenant every day: in the morning, open your eyes, thank God for this new day, smile interiorly that you are alive... and put your feet on the floor!

This morning ritual, a symbol of the life offered at the heart of the covenant, is a sign of trust to try living with God in joy, simplicity and mercy. When repeated over days, months and years, it is a sign of mutual fidelity and covenant.

The first step of the day is, for me, a meaningful sign by which I agree to enter into the covenant with the Other, others and myself, *in the land of the living* (Ps 116:9), whether I have *joy on my lips* (Ps 71:23) or I feel *hopeless* (Ps 88:9). So, putting my feet on the floor is a quasi-

liturgical action by which I begin (again) to celebrate the covenant!

C., a younger Servant of Unity

- Well, C., I do not get up early, I admit; but I have my own little ritual in the evenings before I go to bed: I read the gospel for the next day and there I rediscover the covenant; there are my roots, our roots, like these old linden trees planted in the asphalt of our cities and whose roots meet the soil from before the city was there. Their trunks hold the memory of their history, their leaves and fruit sing the beauty of their origins, and with all creatures, they welcome life in an ongoing creation. As Master Eckhart said: *"God created for eternity, and he begins eternally to create."*

And here we are, a tiny microcosm like these linden trees, within the great microcosm of the universe which is also invited into the covenant!

That is what God wants to connect us to: him, God with us, so that we will be, with him, his servants as well as his friends.

"May the happiness of life never extinguish in us resistance against what distorts it!" (from my memory of a prayer of pastor Gérard Delteil of the Église Protestante Unie de France)

M., a Servant of Unity elder

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Celebrate and live God's covenant... by adapting the form to the situation. In the community itself, we let ourselves be guided by the needs of the moment. The Spirit invites, delights, sometimes shakes things up. This is what happens at *Sonnenhof*, with the new adventure of community life between sisters and those who choose to live with them for a time, supporting them in their mission. Let's hear from one of them:

On February 8 this year, we found ourselves for the first time around the

refectory table at *Sonnenhof*. We are five women who make up the "Weg-gemeinschaft *Sonnenhof*": three sisters from Grandchamp (Sisters Mechthild, Dorothea and Heidi-Elisabeth) and two companions (Martha Jost and Reinhild Schneider), all between the ages of 61 and 67, filled with the desire to live together in the time to come, to put into practice the idea of a community on the way and to welcome guests by

- * living in silence
- * praising God in communal prayer
- * sharing daily life
- * welcoming and accompanying guests
- * managing the house and garden so that those who come can feel at ease.

This is an exciting process, at times involving conflict, during which we learn from each other. We marvel at and rejoice in the gifts of others and bring to them our own: a wonderful complementarity that also involves a bit of friction!

Each person can be who he or she is. This is good, and we hope it can give guests the space they need to feel welcome as they are. We wonder where the path will lead us: Who will join us and how will the *Weggemeinschaft* develop? How can we maintain and develop what is suited to *Sonnenhof* as a house of silence? Are there new emphases, and where are they crystallizing?

Our desire is that our guests, who sometimes come from a difficult family or professional situation, will feel or discover a place where they can rest, find themselves, find God. May those who are affected by the upheavals of the Church and society regain courage and see new perspectives when they share our simple life for a while.

We cannot "do" it. All we can do is be available as we are, with what we have,

trusting that God is creating a space in which others can enter, sense, feel God's presence.

Community life is for us an important scope of practice. Openness, patience, forgiveness and humour: these are the essential ingredients. For the two companions, this means integrating fully at Sonnenhof while maintaining long-term relationships with family, friends, godchildren. For the three sisters in blue, who have been part of the community for 30 years, our questions about why this or that is done are stimulating. They allow the sisters to rediscover what makes up their life.

Together, we must redefine or adapt certain elements, both in practical life and in the liturgy. What is important to keep, and what can we change? It is wonderful to have someone from outside who can assist us in the process of being and becoming a community on the way.

I (Reinhild) can say: I am living in the right place. I can bring my gifts to it and be faced with my limits; with others, I can live in the silence and sing God's praise. I hope that we help people to be touched by God and to find themselves in God's presence. Martha especially loves the liturgical seasons, which are expressed through melodies and through the changing colours of the decor and the icons.

Within each one of us is a hope-filled expectation of what God can do with us, when and with which companions. We didn't just end up here together because we like each other; the relationship to God that each of us is living connects us to each other.

This was noticeable during the sending-forth service at the start of our venture: Sister Anne-Emmanuelle, prioress of the community, and Markus Binder, a

member of the Cercle d'amis, gave us a blessing. We are part of the Grandchamp family. As *Weggemeinschaft*, we are united with all those who live in the spirit of the beatitudes: joy, simplicity, mercy.

Reinhild Schneider

Everything is connected, everything is given, everything is fragile. We are living this reality day to day at Grandchamp, where a number of realities intersect. Here are a few of them:

Retreat times: The days leading up to Pentecost with Dom Marc, father abbot of Hauterive, and this summer with Brother Richard of Taizé.

Meeting times: With pastor Zachée Betché for a discussion about racism, and with pastor Carolina Costa. She shared with us her experience with the LGBTQIA+ community. Talking about these themes helps us to grow in deep respect, to be leaven for unity.

Travel times: Sister Gesine joined Sister Mariane in Congo, where she was spending several months with her family. Sister Regina went to Benin for the Third-Order of Unity retreat, then to Madagascar with Sister Siong to meet the sisters of Mamré. This community lives a monastic vocation within the Malagasy Protestant Church (the FJKM). Sister Gesine spent several days in Morocco attending a session with the novices of the Little Sisters of Jesus.

Session times: Iris Ferreira, a female rabbi from France, with candour and depth, opened to us biblical texts according to Jewish wisdom. Anne Bourrit and Laurence Brusweiler made it possible for 15 sisters to receive training in non-violent communication: a key tool to support our vocation of reconciliation.

Times of celebration: On 22 May, a joyful day marked the founding of the *Cercle d'ami·e·s de Grandchamp* (Circle of Friends of Grandchamp), when around 50 people gathered with us. This celebration ended with the planting of a Japanese maple tree at the entrance to the village. The Cercle d'ami·e·s helps us to undertake what is entrusted to us through prayer, financial donations and concrete assistance in our work. Thank you so much for every gesture of solidarity, which touches our hearts. This has given us a marvellous boost! We now need to see how to coordinate the help of volunteers and delegate various tasks: a revitalizing shift in organization which takes time. For this reason, we have not yet been able to contact everyone who has offered to help us.

On 31 July, the *professions of Sister Embla and Sister Sonja* recalled the joy that is found in giving of oneself without measure. Following the celebration, a meal under the pine tree on the grounds and around the garden brought together a diverse crowd.

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The guests who came this summer saw lots of scaffolding on the grounds: we renovated a part of our roof that greatly needed it!

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Times with the monastic family: The Service des contemplatives de Suisse Romande (SDC) met with Elena Lasida, who shared her great commitment to integral ecology. Sister Marlieke had a brief practicum at the Orthodox monastery *La Protection de la Mère de Dieu*, in Fribourg. Sisters took part in the weekend for young religious from the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

Sister Anne-Emmanuelle, Sister Pierrette and Sister Heidi-Elisabeth participated

in and contributed to the international ecumenical gathering of religious (EIIR, now called Synaxe), whose first gathering was held at Grandchamp 50 years ago. Sisters went to Bose for the professions of two brothers and one sister. This summer, several sisters took turns at Taizé, offering a listening presence to youth and friendship to the brothers of Taizé and the Sisters of Saint Andrew

At Grandchamp, several sisters from other communities spent time with us as volunteers.

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The World Council of Churches invited the community as an observer to its 11th General Assembly, in Karlsruhe, Germany. Sister Anne-Emmanuelle and Sister Svenja had some wonderful encounters with Christians from around the world there.

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A new fraternity was born in Normandie at Sainte-Mère-Église, a village near Utah Beach, a landing area on June 6, 1944. A plan took shape in recent years to promote peace education. We were asked by the sisters of Carmel St Joseph to join them in replacing three other sisters, to be a prayerful, listening and welcoming presence. In mid-September, Sister Pascale and Sister Thérèse joined two Carmel St Joseph sisters to experience community life rooted in prayer in this very significant place.

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Sister Janny continues her presence of friendship in the Netherlands, along with Sister Christianne and Maria de Groot. Sister Anne-Geneviève is still enjoying the home La Lorraine in Bevaix, and Sister Gabrielle le Foyer Handicap in Neuchâtel. She created a show with

several residents, which we had the opportunity to watch one afternoon in the L'Arche chapel.

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Members of our families, of our spiritual family, friends and neighbours entered into the light: Mr Yves de Rougemont and Mme Marie-France Bovet and many

others, whom we entrust to the Father's tenderness.

Everything is connected, everything is fragile, everything is given... As Christmastime approaches, the gift of a fragile new-born baby shows us the way. May his Peace accompany us and guide us throughout the new year.

The Sisters of Grandchamp



Grandchamp 4, CH - 2015 Areuse

www.grandchamp.org: program for 2023 and list of readings
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