

To Saint Andrew's Friends

November 2011



Dear Friends,

Last year was rich in events and changes for us all. Gathered for our General Chapter and with our newly elected General Superior, Sister Agnès Granier, we began the new year with renewed trust and giving of ourselves to God. The document on mission which was elaborated by the General Chapter, invites us to enter more profoundly into the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son : the Father's Love sends Him into the world.

A desire dwells in us. It appears through the news from the communities and it is expressed through a Bible verse, "*Widening the space of your tent*" (Isaiah 54.2). We are happy to share it with you.

At the beginning of Advent, in a world thirsting for fraternal love, justice and peace, let us ask for one another - in the image and likeness of Christ, the Beloved Son - for the Grace that we may remain close to the most everyday human realities and welcome in them – far beyond anything we may imagine – the Lord's unexpected and gentle Presence. He is the One who comes to widen our hearts to the dimensions of His own. May we welcome His gift in humble joy and thankfulness.

To each of you, all our warmest wishes, friendship and prayers.

Sister Clara Pavanello, European Region

Some news from our communities in Europe

Brussels

Ameugny

This year in Ameugny saw the ordinary comings and goings that characterize the community, movements and journeys while staying in the same place... There was an unusual witness to all of this : a building site in the field right in front of the house. Over the months we also followed closely the changes and developments.

Transforming the space we have in order to "widen our tents" and better welcome people, but also to save energy and fuel. The building work has been over since June and we have been able to make use of the new building which hosts several rooms and a library. A beautiful space to live in and welcome our sisters who come for a few days' visit, to have a time of rest or of silent retreat or to help us during busy times.

This year we have also welcomed Jin, Agnes, Ivana and Melissa who joined Clare in the postulancy. On 16th of October, Clare started her novitiate in Lyon...

While the building was in progress, our missions and commitments kept us on the move, calling us to leave home and travel far and near : to Chile and to Rotterdam and at the present moment to Berlin in order to prepare youth meetings ; to visit different areas of the diocese to give a course on spiritual direction or giving Spiritual Exercises in everyday life ; to take part in the preventive health care programme in our area ; to give French or English lessons ; to animate a parish group of young people or Bible groups ; to share a monthly meal with homeless and poor people organized by the 'Secours Catholique' ; to take part in parish life and support it... All this is part of our mission and needs to go hand in hand with our main mission in Taizé which is constantly challenging us in a vital way. All these commitments as well as the various in-house activities are like many doors and windows through which light and life circulate in both directions : thus, He is Present in the midst of all.

This year 2011, the community was renewed by one third. Elisabeth gave us the start in February by leaving and preceding us into the Kingdom.

Lucie, after obtaining her degree in Public Health, was sent to our community of Kikwit in the Congo.

Clara, Catherine, Anne and Nadine had the joy of welcoming Suzy and Katharina : we are now six, just as our first sisters in the Middle Ages, and like them, hospitality is a mission we have at heart.

Since March, once a month, our house opens its door to young people aged 18 to 30, both French and Flemish speaking. In this way we have become unexpectedly the local contacts for a Cistercian initiative called OJP (Orval Jeunes en Prière - Orval Youth in prayer).

For several years now, on the impulse of the brothers, the Cistercian community of Orval welcomes young people who wish to deepen their personal prayer, the meaning of the liturgy and the impact of the Word of God on their lives. Some young people have asked for a place where they can continue to have Bible sharings or simply a time of fraternal sharing somewhere in Brussels and we have decided to spend one evening with them :

- sharing very simply a bowl of soup and sandwiches ;
- having a time of sharing on a Bible text, very often the next Sunday's Gospel ;
- sharing a community prayer in our chapel .

The evening ends joyfully - for those who wish – with a cup of tea or a glass of famous beer... from Orval !!!

This year in Charleroi we have been impressed by the great efforts which have been made in our area to help people to enter into relationships with each other. In our neighbourhood the population is very cosmopolitan : an increasing number of people come from North African countries, especially Marocco and Algeria. They are Muslims and it is not so easy to meet and to talk together. An area committee made up of people from both the Muslim communities and the Catholic parish has undertaken the challenge and organized several events in which people came together : a street party with neighbours, volunteers painting in joyful colours the front wall of the buildings in 'Place du Nord'. These initiatives have awakened the interest and sympathy of many and have encouraged people to talk together and come to know each other without prejudice.

As a community, we have also been involved in these activities. We try to be attentive and be more in touch with what is taking place in our area and thus, more simple contacts and relations are growing between us and our Muslim neighbours.

We also had the joy to welcome a Chinese sister during the Christmas holidays and a young lady from England during Springtime. Their presence and sharing were very enriching for the whole community.

Since September our community and the community of Wépion are one community and we try to give reality to this unity and communion despite the diversity of places and activities. What strengthens our bonds is our weekly meetings on Sunday evening: we gather all together for evening prayer, a meal and a time of sharing.

"Widening the space of our tent" (Is 54, 2) : sharing our Spiritual Resources ...

During the past year the community here at Edenbridge had the opportunity to share our spiritual resources through widening our contacts with the Parish and beyond.

It is two years now since our local Parish Priest began to celebrate the Sunday Evening Mass in our Chapel which is now part of the Parish's week-end celebrations. Individuals and families come from a variety of places in the locality and 'our Sunday congregation' gathers together anything from 6 – 16 visitors, many of whom express their appreciation of our liturgy and our homely welcome.

This year during the Triduum of Holy Week we offered a silent residential retreat with the Community, which included a daily Biblical introduction. It was good to have others joining us in prayer during these three days which form the high point of the Churches' liturgical year. From Maundy Thursday to the Vigil on Holy Saturday each celebration had its own unique 'atmosphere'. The weather was so good that we were all able to gather outside at the beginning of our celebration of the Easter Vigil with the lighting of the Easter Fire and the Blessing of the Paschal Candle. Sharing our life of prayer with others during this very special Holy Week leading to the Resurrection will now be part of our annual programme.

The third initiative, from the beginning of 2011, has been to invite anyone who wishes to an Evening Meditative Taizé Prayer on the last Wednesday of the month. This 'open prayer', which was requested by members coming from the different local churches, includes a hymn, Scripture reading, psalms, a time of silent reflection, and chants on a particular theme introduced and led by a member of the Community. After the prayer we gather together in the library for a time of sharing and some light refreshments. ... and so the space continues to widen...

Lyon

"Widening the space of our tent..." (Is 54,2)

When we started to recall our memories of an important event to share with you, it is not so much an event that came to our minds but rather the acknowledgment of a reality. Dispersed by our mission, what has especially united, nourished and rejoiced us as a community this year was on the one hand a parish project in which several of us were involved, and on the other hand, every time throughout the year that we opened our door to welcome a visitor.

Together we have recalled all those who have visited us during this year : hospitality offered for a short time to some of our sisters, friends and members of our families or more regularly to people for a day of quiet or for meetings taking place in our house; moments of shared celebrations : at Christmas, then with the departure of Agnès Granier who left the Lyon community to her new mission as General Superior, and then at the end of the school year... What a joy to recall all this and to realize why sharing and welcoming are so precious.

Hospitality gathers us together and often gives us the opportunity to prepare something together; these are moments of sharing which unite us.

To welcome means as well to let ourselves be welcomed and to let ourselves be visited. This opens us : it is like a breath of fresh air which goes through our lives and home.

A friend or a family member of one of the sisters becomes the guest of us all.

When someone comes to visit us, it is always the community who welcomes and this gives us the joy to share something of what gives us life and of what we have received.

Dear friends, thank you for everything you have let us experience through your visits and your friendship.

Ramegnies-Chin

The major event which has marked this year is the General Congregation which gathered in our house during the first weeks of January. Every six years the delegates of our communities (Europe, the Congo, Brazil) meet at the Motherhouse together with the General Council to evaluate life in the Congregation during the last years, to consider the present situation and future perspectives with a special attention to the calls of the Spirit within the Church and our contemporary world, and according to our Constitutions.

Throughout 2010 we prayed and reflected on the documents the General Superior and her Council prepared for us. Sister Dinorah, having asked to be discharged of her mandate at the head of the congregation, returned to Brazil in March. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to her.

Since the end of December 2010, we welcomed delegates from France, England, the Congo and Brazil : it was a joy for them and a joy for us all to be in communion through prayer, community life and work.

For the delegates, the General Council and Sister Dinorah, these were weeks of prayer, reflection, studying documents and orientations according to our Constitutions. A great joy was the election of our new General Superior, Agnès Granier (a French sister, former superior of the community in Lyon and novice mistress). We entrust Agnès to the Lord as well as the four members of her Council - Anne-Marie Gasquet (French), Maria Abrão Rodrigues (Brazilian), Waltraud Krull (German) and Clara Pavanello (Italian). For them and for this period opening before us, we count upon your prayers.

And throughout the year ? Community meetings, fraternal gatherings, heartfelt hospitality of families and friends, and people coming for a day of quiet or a silent retreat.

As elderly sisters, but also together with the younger ones, we are close to each of you with our affection and prayer. At the end of this year 2011 we wish to express our thanks to Sister Suzy de Gheest, former superior of our community who has been sent to a new mission in the community of Brussels.

Wépion

In June, together with the Jesuit fathers and co-workers of the Spiritual Centre *La Pairelle*, we went for a pilgrimage to Paris following the path of St Ignatius. Sister Sylvie Robert, director of the Spirituality department at 'Centre Sevres' in Paris, guided us. These were very intense days which helped us to deepen what we wish to live and share with people who come to find spiritual refreshment in the Centre.

This was a year with a lot of changes in the community. Alice arrived from the community of Charleroi. Thanks to her 20 years' experience of animation at the Spiritual Centre of Kipalu (Kikwit) in the Congo, she has quickly adjusted to the different sectors of *La Pairelle* : sessions, retreats, spiritual guidance... Alice is also working part-time in the chaplaincy of the Civil Hospital in Charleroi. Marie-Adèle has joined the Diocesan Committee on Ecumenism as well as a reflection group with pastors of the Reformed Church. After 9 years of work at the Spiritual Centre and at the University Chaplaincy, Muriel was sent to the community of Ameugny.

*Sister Agnès Granier shares some of her experience
with us.....*

In order to embrace the task I have been entrusted with, my first step was to meet and come to know each of our sisters, to visit our communities and share life with them in their particular context.

In Europe, I was offered a renewed way of considering people and the realities of the sisters who are writing this newsletter.

The communities in the Congo gave me a warm welcome : three different places, three different realities in a country where justice and peace are still searching for a way forward.

Many questions and concerns remain with me, and particularly these : with what ways can we express that we are brothers and sisters in Christ ? How can we deepen our experience of mutual conversion ?

I am thankful to have met each of our sisters in Brazil and to have been able to encounter so closely our almost 100 year long history with this country as well as the reality of today's life in our communities. In this country which is going through impressive economic growth, the Church needs to find new ways to live out the values of the Gospel... At the heart of Brazilian society, our communities try to open paths of hope.

Brazil, the Congo, Europe... during these visits, the invitation we received during our General Chapter has become even more strong and real : "Are we not invited to welcome unconditionally Christ who alone can deliver us from the domination of possessiveness and give us to be 'of one heart and one soul' in Him ? Only then... will we be able to convert ourselves to God's call and give concrete answers to His calls according to the grace He gives us, as sisters of Saint Andrew ?" ... God's faithfulness is creative !!!

Sisters who have preceded us into the Kingdom

this year

Marie-Louise Vincke (Ramegnies-Chin)

Élisabeth Schmid (Brussels)

Chafica Barcha (São João)

Enedina Farias da Silva - Mariana - (São João)

Margaret Ireland (Edenbridge)

Monica Healy (Edenbridge)

God's faithfulness

Jubilees celebrated during this year :

25 years of religious life :

Lucie Mwamba Nkongolo, Sigrun Gross, Núria Sabé Griful

50 years of religious life : Hildegard Wiltuschnig, Katrien Alexander

60 years of religious life : Jeanne Bosteels

Saint Andrew's in Brazil

- In June, the elderly professed sisters and the younger professed sisters met for a time of sharing and reflection on the theme of mission.

- A new community has started in Recife and since July Maria Abrão teaches theology at the Jesuits' university in Recife.

Saint Andrew's in the Congo

- On 15th May, Mireille Kasongo pronounced her final vows. The celebration was held at Kikwit in the chapel of our secondary school, Siama.

- In May, all the professed sisters in the Congo gathered for a time of sharing on the letter of the General Congregation.

- On 3rd September, Marine Mabombi made her first vows in Lubumbashi.

Some important and joyful events in Europe

- At the end of December 2010, the Taizé European Meeting in Rotterdam, Netherlands : once again we experienced the strength of trust.

- In January, the general chapter gathered in Ramegnies-Chin and Sister Agnès Granier was elected General Superior and the Councillors were also elected.

- At the end of March, the professed sisters in Europe met during a week-end to reflect together on the letter of the General Congregation and particular attention was given to the document about mission.

- In April 2011, the temporary professed sisters in Europe gathered for a week-end to reflect and share about the vow of chastity.

- In May, Sigrun attended the meeting of the *Kaire* group on the theme of 'Visitation'. This gathering was also an opportunity to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the existence of the group. It took place in Bossey, near Geneva, Switzerland, at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches.

- Beginning of July, meeting of our elderly professed sisters on the theme of mission "*Sent into the world, as the Son, within the Church and together with others*".

- Mid-September, Bep, Anne Esselbach and Lorella left to Berlin to prepare the next Taizé European Meeting.

- End of September, Diane went to Sweden together with a team to give a course on spirituality and to guide an Ignatian retreat for priests and pastoral workers.

- On 16th October, Clare O'Handley entered the novitiate in Ameugny.

- On 13th November, Jessica Rolland made her first vows in Ameugny.