


10
YEARS

"Together in Mission"
REUNIFICATION



***"What
are you
talking about
as you walk along?"***

Luke 24,17



PRESENTATION

This coming 27th June, we will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of the reunification of two congregations, Our Lady of Charity and Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. It's an adventure we decided to embark on in the certainty that God is walking with us. That's why this tool for reflection has been prepared with the intention of responding in a simple, sincere, prayerful and open way to the question **"What are you talking about as you walk along?"**, the same question that Jesus asked the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. We are on a journey and every step we take, whether personal and/or communal (Sisters - lay Mission Partners) enriches the process of mutual learning and communion in the Spirit.

The history of our congregations is sacred land where we find the origin of our identity, the sources of our spirituality, the passionate zeal of mission, the exemplary strength of contemplative prayer and the witness of women and men transformed by the love of God into disciples of hope. We therefore propose to review **Reread 373 years of history...** written by Sister Marie Françoise Le Brizaut (1940-2019). She has written an excellent synthesis of the origins of our congregations to help us understand how we came to the Reunification.

We also propose a prayerful reflection on the first verses of **The Road to Emmaus, as a road to reunification**, taking as its starting point the question that Jesus asks the disciples on their journey. Jesus accompanies the disciples, as a mother does with her children, as a shepherd who knows his sheep, as a father who is touched to the depths of his being... A simply merciful presence that brings about a transformation of what has been done...

On this journey, it is also important to listen to some of the **Experiences of the Road**. Listening attentively, from the heart, to what certain Sisters, lay people and communities have "spoken" over these ten years. This will be a good opportunity to share what dwells in our hearts in all simplicity, without double talk or theoretical elaboration... simply by sharing the experience of our journey.

Finally, we will offer you the **Eucharistic readings from the celebration** of 27th June 2014, as well as the prayer of OUR ENRICHMENT JOURNEY in which we can name those who made the journey at the same time as us (Sisters, lay people) and perhaps our own names.

May St John Eudes' passionate love for Jesus and Mary kindle our love for a world that is fairer and shows greater solidarity,

May the daring zeal of St Mary Euphrasia encourage us to go beyond our borders; and

May our Blessed Sisters Marie Thérèse de Soubiran, Maria Droste zu Vischering and Maria Agustina Rivas, (Aguchita) teach us to walk humbly with our God.



1. RE-READING 373 YEARS OF HISTORY

This re-reading of history comes in the context of the celebrations in Caen and Angers for the reunification of two congregations born from the same intuition: Our Lady of Charity and Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

This re-reading is situated in the context of the reunification; its objective is not to say everything but to better understand how we came to reunite the two branches of the same river arising from the same spring.

Besides, it takes place at a specific time, on June 27th, 2014 in Caen, as the first part of a two day celebration which will continue in Angers on June 28th.

We also need to recall that this re-reading takes place during a festive and prayerful celebration, as a Sacred Story: the story of a part of the people of the Living God, who join their present realities and trustfully turn towards the future, in responding to the emerging calls of the mission of mercy and reconciliation.

Caen, June 30, 2014

The complete text is at the end of this document.

2. ROAD TO EMMAUS, REUNIFICATION ROAD

Gospel according to Saint Luke 24 :13 - 18

"On that same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus himself came near and began to walk along with them. They were prevented from recognizing him.

He said to them,

- "What are you talking about as you walk along?"

They stopped; their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied:

- "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?"

Here are some ideas for discussion:

- The Road to Emmaus is a very common text, and every time we return to it, we always find an inexhaustible source of the experience of the first Christian communities after Easter. "This story of the disciples and Jesus on the road to Emmaus shows us how God's grace works, an image of divine grace - God's grace made flesh in Jesus, walking, talking, eating: divine grace made common, God's grace transforming our ordinary lives, which have become human in Jesus, into encounters and relationships full of grace."
- **The text indicates that "two of them were on their way"**; they are both members of the community. Setting out implies an attitude of openness to the newness of the journey, even if the aim is to reach the destination. In this context, it is essential to stop and reflect on the process of walking, that is, to give a name to our lived experience, to identify the concrete faces with which we made the journey, the feelings that inhabited us, the thoughts that accompanied us, what was not clear... In any case, it's not about judging and falling into the dualistic judgement of good or evil. It's about welcoming our experience with mercy and compassion, and embracing our human vulnerability as a sign of mutual care. To bring together and highlight the learning, the wisdom of our journey, the wisdom of our experience.

- **“And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus himself came near and began to walk along with them”.** The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, as Pope Francis' culture of encounter, is a response to a fragmented and wounded world, marked by individualism, egoism and violence that breed exclusion and marginalisation. It is a response to indifference, to stubbornness of heart and to the walls that divide us and prevent us from meeting as brothers and sisters. It is a voice in the midst of the shadows, pointing out paths of light and hope to transform the world, and travelling paths of encounter, friendship, life, hope and peace to achieve fraternal and peaceful coexistence between all people, adopting attitudes of dialogue, welcome, respect, inclusion and mutual support. It teaches us to look at others with love and to recognise their dignity as persons, to discover the presence of God in the faces of our brothers and sisters lovingly created in the image and likeness of God. We are all children of God, endowed with goodness and grace, capable of loving and doing good by building bridges of true encounter, establishing new human, moral and fraternal relationships in the image of Jesus Christ. There is an urgent need to build a culture of encounter between all people, because we are all brothers and sisters.
- **“Jesus said to them : “What are you talking about as you walk along?”...** A key question in the journey of discipleship. In the experience of spiritual accompaniment, it is extremely important to talk about the lived process, because this allows feelings, concerns and movements of the spirit to be expressed in concrete words... in other words, to focus all attention on the personal process (emotional, psychological, human and spiritual); we all therefore need to feel accompanied, especially by someone who can give us meaning, confidence, love and salvation. Accompanying the journey becomes a sacred space of transformation "to realise that... here and now".

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

- And now, we ask ourselves: "What are we talking about on the eve of 10 years of Reunification?"
- Looking back over the last ten years, how have we evolved and grown in the history and spirituality of our congregation?
- An invitation to "see" our reality, ourselves, our new way of life as a mission of accompaniment? Under the loving gaze of God.
- What desires and hopes do I/we have?



3. EXPERIENCES ON OUR WAY

10 years after the reunification: What were you discussing on the way?

About what we had just experienced together in the community in Cormelles-le-Royal!

For my part, as soon as I arrived in 2017, I was delighted to be invited by Marie-Françoise Le Brizaut to take part in a 3-day pilgrimage in the footsteps of John Eudes, which she was leading for the Sisters at the Spirituality Centre in Angers. Over and above this invitation, I sensed Marie-Françoise's intention that we should form ourselves for pilgrimages. For me, who had been on pilgrimages to Marie-Euphrasie in Angers, Tours and Noirmoutier, it was like an inner call to become more of a daughter of John Eudes!

As soon as I arrived, Marie-Emmanuelle took me on a tour of the Our Lady of Charity community in Cormelles, following the Second World War. I realised what the Sisters had gone through in the recent past, and also the reasons why they gradually withdrew and built smaller, due to the reduction in religious personnel.

I was faced with the same reality as Our Lady of the Good Shepherd (OLCGS) in France.

At the beginning, I was the only OLCGS sister in the Le Verger community. What helped me was to see each Sister as a person first! I tried to take an interest in the memories that the Sisters shared, and to get to know the Sisters they were talking about. In this way, I felt I was becoming one of them.

At the first feast of Mary Euphrasia, one of the Sisters wanted to get to know Mary Euphrasia better. After some discussion, we decided to do an exhibition on her life and mission, on condition that it would be organized by 2 OLCGS Sisters (with the participation of the Le Clos community) and 2 OLC Sisters. I was very touched by the interest and encouragement of the OLC Sisters.

At the end of 2018, Marie Françoise Le Brizaut, during her last visit, expressed the wish that we reorganise the last room of the Museum around the reunification, the large family today and the mission. In 2019, 8 Sisters from the 4 communities of Caen/Cormelles decided to reflect on this project. This reflection, after a number of steps forward and pauses, has just led to the realisation phase: a fresco that artistically expresses the history of the reunification.

In the end, all these years have been linked to this project, which has helped us to get to know each other's congregations, to appreciate their different histories and to take an interest in them. Along the way, wasn't it the Heart of Jesus, given to us by John Eudes, that led us to the reunification of our congregations?

*Sr Madeleine GUIGUE,
Community Coordinator Le Verger - Caen*

10 years after the reunification: What were you discussing on the way?

Echoing the text of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they have made their way with Christ without knowing it. They will become aware of his presence once he makes the gesture of breaking bread. In this way, our two Congregations were able to go their separate ways before realising that they were both guided by the same compass, namely their charism, their spirituality and their mission. This journey together was like the breaking of bread that opened the eyes of the disciples of Emmaus to recognise Christ in their midst. From then on, our two Congregations understood that pooling their heritage was essential if they were to continue the holy work bequeathed by Saint John Eudes, the true father of Saint Mary Euphrasia. Today, we see this Reunification as a force for unity of hearts and minds in order to live out our specific mission in today's societies, which are so much in need of authentic witnesses of merciful love. Indeed, as we celebrate these 10 years of the grace of Reunification, let us listen to the roads that are calling us!

*Community OLCGS
International Francophone Noviciate*

Since June 27, 2014, - date of the reunification of our two Congregations: OLC and Good Shepherd - we discussed a lot along the way. A woman is at the origin of our exchanges: Mary Euphrasia who enters OLC and finds herself becoming a young superior. Innovative and concrete, she heard a calling: to make possible the extension of the congregation while maintaining its attachment to Father Eudes, founder of OLC. Her audacity is remarkable. It achieved a generalate.

Women are always despised, hurt, rejected... and in our 21st century the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd come together for the mission of serving these women today. After 180 years of parallel paths, we built together. The essence of our exchanges today is the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, the charism of mercy.

Since our reunification we have learned to know and appreciate each other. Each meeting between us is a real shared joy. We truly feel we come from the same Founding Father. After these ten years, many proposals have been made to project us into the future.

Personally, I think that we need to integrate the laity much more into the congregation: to open new avenues of commitment. We are aware that we need to get out of our comfort zone. The Zeal specific to our congregation always fuels our discussions and helps us to be innovative and creative. Helps us put the emergency within our reach.

I am happy to live this journey with our Sisters from all countries.

*Guy COUTAREL- RIGAL
Lay Associate*

10 years after the reunification: What were you discussing on the way?

I was present on the day of reunification in Caen. I gave thanks a lot and thanked the Lord for having allowed me to live this great day: an event of great human, spiritual and historical quality, a journey of prayer and work that began more than 10 years ago for all of us apostolic and contemplative. For in November 1825, when St. Mary Euphrasia, in charge of Tours, faithful to the foundation made by St. John Eudes, and imbued with the spirituality of Our Lady of Charity, founded the Contemplative Sisters, it was a remarkable event in the city of Tours before arriving in 1835 at the Generalate of the Good Shepherd - even if the latter caused a separation - for the same spirituality and the same mission.

Years have passed. Today I say aloud in my heart... it was a work of the Holy Spirit since it could not have been achieved with our own strength alone, only divine action could have done it.

The reunification of the two Congregations, seen as the culmination of many years of collaboration and friendship, brought great joy. Two Congregations did their best to make a second thing out of it, and we gave it the meaning "that it was done for the mission". What courageous consecrated women we are! The zeal is there!

The reunification was celebrated on 27th 2014, feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with a large representation of Sisters and Mission Partners. There was an openness to community integration, hospitality and contact with Sisters from all over the province. Reunification has enabled us to build relationships and develop a greater appreciation of our unity in diversity (Const. 34).

This event helped to broaden perspectives, improve understanding and knowledge of situations, and establish links with Sisters and communities. It also strengthened the sense of belonging and of knowing more about the reality of each Congregation. The Sisters shared their experience of working together as a group, which was very positive. We hope to continue to deepen relationships, and it would be important to continue building bridges and links.

For us, this is the meaning of reunification; that is why we will remain the watchmen who ceaselessly pray to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to grant us the strength and creativity to continue to nourish this abundant life and dig deeper and deeper to become even more thirsty for Love and mercy through our testimony.

*Contemplative community - La Garenne
Angers.*



10 years after the reunification: What were you discussing on the way?

Reunification after 10 years... expressions from the Sisters at Cormelles Le Royal

- "... the letter from the 2 Councils of the Congregations, preceding the work of enrichment (2007-2014): a stroke of the Holy Spirit to bring us together!"
- "Today his action continues!... We live in trust. We have united our poverties and our riches, and we have opened up new horizons. Blessed be God!"
- "The logic of history has brought us together again, driven by the Spirit! We've done very well, and I'm very happy. We were autonomous communities. Now I feel I know the lives of the Sisters better."
- "I'll put in a few nuances: for me, the contribution of the Good Shepherd in human relations is real"
- "As treasurer, I was wondering about the viability of the communities in the future. This solution has reassured me."
- "At first, I felt a disproportion between the Good Shepherd and us. I was embarrassed by his importance because, on a smaller scale, we all knew each other and we knew everything. Now the decisions are taken, far away from us! On the other hand, I discovered that the Good Shepherd was more open than us on an international level, and this contribution will enable others to continue to live the 4th vow!"
- "I was happy to come to this birthplace of the congregation. I had a special relationship with Marie-Françoise Le Brizaut in this respect and I took part in a commission in Angers, with Sisters from Our Lady of Charity. I was delighted to come to Cormelles!"
- "Age is a limit in this source area. We need a younger Sister.... And to be open to lay partners in all areas. We need to be more open to relationships between ourselves and more widely: we need to be in contact with the Diocesan House to make ourselves known."
- "The international aspect is both a strength and a weakness. I feel that there is a lack of interpersonal experience between us, but on the other hand we are more open internationally."
- "The tensions between us are due more to personal issues than to the fact that we are two congregations."
- "Reunification: a time of grace, because at Cormelles/Caen we have the richness of both branches. I'd like to move forward a little faster! How is the Spirit going to push us?"
- "I appreciate being a mixed community!"
- "I'm happy, but I thought the Good Shepherd was younger than us and had fewer problems. But in the end, it's almost the same! The positive thing is life on an international level. It balances things out."
- "How can we revitalise the community and this place of origin?"

4. PROPOSAL FOR A EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

Eucharistic celebration on 27th June 2014 in Cormelles Le Royal-Caen

- First reading from the book of Deuteronomy 7:6-11
- Psalm 145:8:
R/ "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."
- Second Reading from the First Letter of Saint John 4:7-16
- Gospel of Matthew 11:25-30

Eucharistic Celebration, 28th June 2014, Angers

- First reading Ez 36,23-27
- Psalm 57:
R/ My heart is ready, O God; my heart is ready, And I will sing! Yes, I will sing praise!
- Second Reading: Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 5:5-11
- Gospel of Saint John 15, 9-17

Prayer of the Enrichment Journey

God, our Creator, you have given us life and you have called us to respond to you in freedom and love in today's world.

All of us, Our Lady of Charity and Good Shepherd, come before you trusting in your infinite love and anchored in our common heritage in the Heart of your Son, who gave his life for us like the Good Shepherd with his sheep. Your great Heart is the source of our charism of merciful love; may your Heart continue to inspire us with charity and zeal for our mission of life, hope and reconciliation.

We bless you for the special intuition you gave to St John Eudes, St Mary Euphrasia, (and mention other people in our history, living or dead, who inspire us) who responded with generosity and creativity to the needs of women, children and families in their time and in their history.

In response to your invitation to be mystical and prophetic in a new way in this 21st century, we commit ourselves to the path of enrichment that you offer us, knowing that "now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3,20)