

CHAPTER 2

The Adventure of Open Communion

Putting Down Ecclesial Roots Far and Near

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES ARE more diverse even than the many Orthodox churches. As a “community of prayer and reconciliation of monastic inspiration with an ecumenical vocation,” it is essential that our community be firmly rooted in the local as well as the universal church. Local roots allow for universal participation. The village of Grandchamp is located in the canton of Neuchâtel. Our community, bringing together sisters of several Protestant churches, is recognized by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Neuchâtel,¹ itself attached to the Federation of Protestant Churches of Switzerland. In this way we are also participants in the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Knowing the origins of a Protestant person (Reformed, Lutheran, Mennonite, etc.) does not necessarily mean knowing the style of church she comes from. Many of our sisters are Reformed, but from different countries. Within these countries, as with the different cantons of Switzerland, the tone of these same churches can be different, since each church bears the traces of its history and its political and cultural context. This great diversity of churches highlights the influence of the ecumenical movement on the rapprochement between certain churches throughout the world. Since 1947, for example, a new church has formed in South India by uniting Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists under the leadership of one bishop. Other mergers have taken place since then. During the postwar period, several Free Churches of French-speaking Switzerland, which had separated from the state churches in the nineteenth century, reunited. We are witnessing a

1. Église Réformée Évangélique du Canton de Neuchâtel (EREN).

similar movement elsewhere in the world. In Canada, for example, as well as in the Netherlands, where the three largest Protestant churches (two Reformed churches and one Lutheran) have united to become the Protestant Church of the Netherlands.² This is the fruit of patient preparation over the past twenty years by a process called “Together on the way.” In Europe, the churches of the Reformation have recognized one another’s ministry and sacraments since the Concord of Leuvenberg, 1973.³

We ourselves are living this type of ecumenism within our community of sisters who are Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Reformed. Another distinctive feature opens us to the universality of the church: our integration in the local church depends on our geographical location. In French- and German-speaking Switzerland, our community belongs to Reformed churches; in Algeria, to Methodist and Reformed churches, themselves supported by the local Catholic Church, that try to care for the Protestant Church of Algeria, whose churches are increasingly filled with Indigenous people. In Jerusalem, our Fraternity of Saint Elisabeth is connected to the Lutheran Church.

It is vital that our rootedness in a local church be unambiguous. That is why the recognition of the Community of Grandchamp by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Neuchâtel (EREN) in 1987 was a cause of so much joy. In the 1960s, this church designated Pastor Robert Cand, former president of the Synod, to be our liaison with the local synod and to be available for celebrations, spiritual direction, confessions, and so on. For eucharistic celebrations, the community depends on pastors in the region. At our invitation, these pastors come to preside at our eucharistic celebrations, which is a learning experience for all, and keeps us from being self-sufficient; we need our local church, and the church can count on us and our regular prayer. This reciprocity is at the very heart of our call to unity.

Recall that in the Reformed churches, authority is with the synod, whereas on the global level, the churches are organized in alliances or federations. In this context, as a community of monastic inspiration with an ecumenical vocation, with members from several different churches of the Reformation, we felt the need to establish a board of reference. It is composed of two sisters, one of them the prioress, and five external members, Protestant and Catholic, including our chaplain, a religious sister and a monk. This board of reference keeps a fraternal eye on the community and can be consulted when the need arises. In this way our community shows its desire for interdependence with the church rather than self-sufficiency.

2. Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN).

3. Birmelé, “Concorde de Leuvenberg,” 253.

As for our local involvement, for the first thirty years, the sisters participated in Sunday services in the local parishes. At that time, eucharistic celebrations were rare. Grandchamp was the exception! Each Thursday night, the Lord's Supper was celebrated in our chapel with a local pastor.

As our hospitality increased, we felt the need to celebrate our own Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, before breakfast. On special occasions, one or another of our sisters still attends local Sunday services . . . and our African sisters participate from time to time in the services organized by the African Christian community in Neuchâtel, sometimes bringing other sisters with them. In this way we keep in touch with the realities of life around us.

On the topic of our liturgy, Pastor Bruno Burki, for many years professor of liturgy at the Catholic Faculty of Theology of Fribourg, wrote:

By their responsiveness to the expectation of a Eucharistic spirituality, the Community of Grandchamp has served a felt need among pastors and faithful members of the Protestant Churches, who, in this generation, have discovered the essential place of the Eucharist in the life of a Christian community. The movement toward celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday in Protestantism in this country has been greatly supported by Grandchamp.⁴

In 1962, the Brothers of Taizé published *Liturgies pascales*, which proposed, among other things, an Easter sunrise liturgy. The following year we introduced it, always mindful that liturgy forms our faith. This important celebration has gradually spread in the region and also in other Protestant parishes of French-speaking Switzerland.

On the local front, our ties with the Faculty of Theology of Neuchâtel⁵ have been strong, and a number of sisters have taken courses there. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, this faculty was renowned in Europe and beyond for its openness to ecumenism.⁶ At that time this was rare! A wonderful reciprocity developed when Mother Geneviève introduced ecumenical sessions, and students from the faculty were given time off from classes to participate.

Ties with the local church are also very concrete. Sisters have been members of the parish council of our church (EREN) in the nearby town

4. Burki, "Liturgie et communauté monastique," 9–13.

5. Closed June 2015.

6. A personal relationship developed with Professors Philippe Menoud, Jean-Jacques von Allmen, and Jean-Louis Leuba. Each one in his own manner had a particular tie to Mother Geneviève and the Community of Grandchamp.

of Boudry. We welcome leaders of the local parishes and are often asked to help with spiritual renewal or ecumenical initiatives taken by these churches. Finally, one of our sisters is a delegate to the Synod of EREN.

We remain in relationship with the Federation of Protestant Churches of Switzerland (FEPS). When we were threatened by the construction of a small airport next door (on the Areuse plain), the Federation supported us in our opposition. Unfortunately, in vain! On a happier note, we received an invitation through the Federation to participate in the welcoming of Pope John Paul II to Kehrsatz, Switzerland, in 1984. Our ties with the FEPS were enhanced when the Federation created an office to maintain contact with Protestant religious communities of celibate men and women (including deaconesses), and mixed communities.

Rooted In the Same Ecumenical Dynamic

The beginnings of the World Council of Churches and Grandchamp are rooted in the same ecumenical dynamic. The message of Jeremiah, “When the world is troubled . . . God acts,” was seen in the “yes” of a few Christians whom God has made great witnesses, even prophets, of rapprochement. It happened between individuals in the youth movements (YMCA/YWCA),⁷ among students in the World Student Christian Federation,⁸ then among those engaged in mission and social action who were from different church backgrounds—Protestants and Anglicans. Their eyes were opened by seeing the great suffering, such as poverty and alcohol abuse, in the countries where they worked and in the inner cities of “Christian” countries. They had become aware of just how scandalous it was that different branches of the church should be competing with each other in areas where there was such great need for a word of liberation, of true compassion, and a word of Gospel. In 1910, the World Missionary Conference, took place in Edinburgh, with John Mott, an American Methodist, and Charles Brent, an Episcopalian Bishop serving in the Philippines. The final message of the Mission Conference was this: “The aim of all missionary work is to plant in each non-Christian nation one undivided church of Christ.”⁹

A network of relationships developed through these international and inter-confessional contacts. In this context it was a great shock to many, at the time of World War I, to find themselves in opposing camps. In 1920, as the Spirit continued to blow, the Ecumenical Patriarch (the leader of most

7. Young Men's/Women's Christian Association.

8. WSCF, also known as the Fédé by francophones.

9. Fernand-Laurent, *Que tous soient un . . . en Sommes Nous Proches?*

Orthodox churches) wrote a letter to the various churches to encourage fellowship, *koinonia*, among Christians. Between the wars more and more individuals, church leaders, and youth movements met together with a view to renewing the churches and working toward peace and openness. Roger Schutz, who would become Brother Roger of Taizé, participated in an international ecumenical gathering of youth at Amsterdam in August 1939.¹⁰

All of these occasions were opportunities for the participants to deepen their faith, to open themselves to other expressions of the liturgy and to be stimulated by a renewed reading of the Bible and study of their own church's spirituality. Each one was moved by the prayer of Christ "that they may be one that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The ecumenical meetings that followed, including with the Orthodox, allowed the participants to form relationships of friendship and solidarity across borders. Even the Second World War did not destroy this powerful experience in the communion of saints on earth. These friendships were a source of great consolation amid all the desolation and despair. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, experienced this solidarity among Christians during his resistance, imprisonment, and execution by the Nazis. He was greatly supported by his friendship with the Anglican Bishop Bell and the Reformed ecumenist Visser 't Hooft. Before his execution he gave an Anglican fellow prisoner, Payne Best, a message for Bishop Bell: "Tell him, for me, that this is the end, but also the beginning. With him I believe in our universal brotherhood which must supersede all nationalistic interests and that our victory is certain."¹¹

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded in Amsterdam in 1948, with some participants still wounded by the war. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church was not one of the participants. The war had delayed this event by ten years! In fact, since 1939 Dr. Visser 't Hooft, appointed Secretary of a preparatory office, had been living in Geneva; he kept up as many international connections as possible, preparing for the postwar era. In 1946 he was able to rent the Chateau of Bossey, near Geneva (now the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey), and made it a place for meetings, ecumenical formation, and reconciliation. Participants from the various churches of the world can meet there for a few weeks or even longer.

After the war, one of our Dutch sisters had already participated in a meeting for "workers in the church." Grandchamp's relations with the WCC

10. World Conference of Christian Youth, Amsterdam, 1939, organized by the Joint Youth Commission of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, The Youth Group Committee of the Faith and Order Movement, and The International Missionary Council.

11. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 847–48.

far surpass those facilitated by our institutional membership through the Evangelical Reformed Church of Neuchâtel (EREN). The Community of Grandchamp has always been close to the WCC, especially through the Ecumenical Sessions of Grandchamp to prepare for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (1950–1965). Often Mother Geneviève and Pastor Jean de Saussure, later Professor Leuba, invited WCC leaders as speakers. Nothing was a given in this era, and Catholic theologians could not always come. However, Father Jerome Hamer O.P. did participate in 1956, as did Dom Olivier Rousseau of Chevetogne. Later it became easier to obtain permission from the Catholic authorities to attend such meetings. In addition to Orthodox theologians like Paul Evdokimov and Leon Zander,¹² and theological faculty members from French-speaking Swiss universities, a number of theologians came to us from the Bossey Institute. These sessions helped to develop an effective ecumenical network. Suzanne de Dietrich, for example, chose to begin her retirement at Grandchamp in 1954. Our sisters had the privilege of welcoming her, studying the Bible with her, and meeting friends of hers from around the world. In addition to her presence at Bossey, she was recognized for her outstanding ability to hold together currents of the ecumenical movement as diverse as the youth ministries of the YMCA and WSCF, missions, Faith and Order, Life and Work, and the liturgical renewal.

The fruit of this friendship is the special relationship we have with her spiritual son Hans-Ruedi Weber. He was for many years head of the Biblical department of the World Council of Churches, and as such our ties were strengthened at the end of the 1970s. From 1980 to 1985 and from 1990 to 1994, sisters participated in the Graduate School of the Bossey Institute, a semester of studies organized for pastors, priests, and theology students. Our sisters were responsible for preparing the evening praise service and were a presence of prayer, listening, and friendship. In 1981, a group of theologians from the WCC came to Grandchamp to work on the preparations for the 6th Assembly in Vancouver, Canada.

From the beginning, Grandchamp has supported the WCC with prayer, grateful for all the work of reconciliation among Christians accomplished there. We are attentive to its inner workings. For example, at the Harare Assembly in Zimbabwe in 1998, the WCC went through a crisis; the Orthodox Churches called into question their participation, discouraged because the Protestants had more influence in decision making. This crisis was settled at the Porto Alegre Assembly in Brazil in 2006. At times like this, we intensify our prayers for the WCC, without losing hope, for knowing the

12. Russian Orthodox Theologian who taught at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris and was present at the first two sessions of Vatican II.

history of our own community shows us that God is watching over the work begun in them. If the forces of darkness are at work to destroy and separate what should be united, these forces cannot conquer the church of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the birthing of a universal communion of the churches and Christian confessions is already experienced in part in the WCC, a communion of churches in a world divided by painful fractures of which even the creation is a victim.

In this context, the challenge of the monastic and apostolic communities is highly relevant: how can we be, in the name of Christ and moved by the Spirit, ever more respectful of one another? How can we truly reconcile our many differences within our communities in order to become places of hope for others? One of our sisters participated in the WCC Assembly at Porto Alegre in 2006.¹³ She returned with renewed hope, which was infectious.

As prioress, I also had the privilege of participating in several of the Assemblies, each of which was a stage in the development of the WCC. I recall well, for example, the sixth, in Vancouver, in 1983. Sister Fides, of the Community of Imshausen, and I were partly responsible for prayer on the campus. A large delegation from the Pacific Islands was there with us to bear witness to what their people were going through; we were on the shores of the same ocean and far away, on the other side, a people was suffering because of the nuclear tests conducted in their region. The day of their testimony, we were to celebrate together the feast of the Transfiguration and the anniversary of the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. The theme of the Assembly, "Jesus Christ, Life of the World," encouraged us to accept our responsibility to open up to one another theologically, in our humanity, and spiritually. We, the whole people of God gathered there, must choose life, reach out to others, and make alliances beyond these two weeks, beyond these celebrations under a big tent, expressing all the richness of our differences, beyond the cries of despair as well. Together we became very aware of our joint responsibility for the very survival of the planet. A night of prayer took place on August 6, remembering Hiroshima. It was also a night of solidarity with the Pacific Islanders and South Africans, a night of waiting for Desmond Tutu, who finally received his visa and arrived at midnight! How good it is to feel we are on the same wavelength, in solidarity with God's creation! By our way of life, we try to be active participants in the process of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation"—a theme taken up once again at the Assembly in Seoul in 1990, in which Catholics participated. At Vancouver I realized more clearly just how much Grandchamp is a small

13. See the testimony of Sister Anne-Emmanuelle in chapter 4.

cell in the universal church; I met many old friends there and established many new connections.

From an ecclesial perspective, the high point of Vancouver was unquestionably the presentation of the Faith and Order document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) at a solemn ceremony. This convergence text was developed by Faith and Order, now a commission of the WCC; Faith and Order includes Catholic theologians authorized by their church.¹⁴ Since then, this text has served effectively as a point of reference for many mutual recognition agreements between churches, and it remains a model today.

The Assembly in Canberra in 1991, during the Gulf War, had the theme “Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation!” I was asked to speak about monastic spirituality, for since Vancouver, spirituality had become more and more important for the WCC.

On the European level, the Assembly at Basel marked a joyful new stage: for the first time, the Conference of European Churches (KEK),¹⁵ composed of Anglicans, Protestants, and Orthodox, and the Council of [Catholic] European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE),¹⁶ planned a large ecumenical event together. On this occasion, another first occurred: the participation of Christians from the Eastern bloc. A symbolic march was organized around the city of Basel on German, French, and Swiss (Dreiländereck) territory, and all without visas. The borders opened, as a sign of what was to come: a few months later the Berlin wall would fall! The organizers had also chosen “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” as the theme of the meeting. The second European Assembly, in Graz, Austria, focused on “Reconciliation—Gift of God and Source of New Life.” An ecumenical charter was proposed and signed at Strasbourg in 2001 by numerous churches. The charter serves as a reference point for churches and Christians who seek to live this spirit each day in concrete ways. The theme of the third Assembly, at Sibiu in Romania in 2007, was “The Light of Christ Illumines All People.”

In this overview of our ecclesial involvement both near and far, I have not spoken of that fundamental reality of the one church which we enjoy: our monastic ties. They are true visitations, which is why I have chosen to speak of them separately in chapter 3. Nevertheless, I would like to mention here our ties with the monasteries of our region. At the beginning of 1980, as prioress, I was invited to take part in meetings of the SDC (*Service des*

14. Faith and Order, originating at the time of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, is one of the three constitutive organizations that joined together to form the WCC in 1948.

15. Conférence des Églises Chrétiennes/Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen.

16. Conseil des Conférences Episcopales Européennes.

Contemplatives de Suisse Romande)¹⁷ with the Little Sisters of Jesus, like us, un-cloistered contemplatives. These annual meetings brought us very close together, and our relations deepened during the period when I was a member of the committee. The major events marking the life of each community and monastery also brought us together. The concrete result of this is that for some years now, our novices have benefited from a biblical formation within the framework of an inter-novitiate relationship with the SDC. Grandchamp organizes, from time to time, sessions for leaders of monastic communities in Switzerland and France. Thanks to our monastic ties, our sister responsible for novices participates in the meeting of those with the same ministry in their respective orders. These include Cistercians, Benedictines, the Protestant Deaconesses of Reuilly (France), and the ecumenical *Monastero di Bose* (Italy). This very real communion is a rich blessing for all of us. We are so different from one another. Many prejudices have fallen away and we have discovered each other's reality. We all seek to be a living sign of communion and witnesses to the living Christ.

Yes, I firmly believe that in order to be credible in their witness, the Christian churches are called to recover their unity: "That they may be one, Father, that the world may believe that you sent me!" (John 17:21). They are also called to become more and more aware of their responsibility to proclaim the Gospel of Christ together, to glorify God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, together, but also together to make the world, which has been entrusted to us, a more habitable place. In the image of what was experienced in a small way at Graz and Porto Alegre, the church united in Christ bears the responsibility of becoming a forum where Christians from different parts of the globe can reflect together in their praise and in their lamentation. We must seek to understand one another on a theological level, but not only on that level. As followers of Christ, our commitment to solidarity compels us to give a voice to the voiceless and, if necessary, to become their voice.

Easter, Feast of Feasts . . . of Unity

LEADER: Let us proclaim our faith in the living and true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the faith of our baptism. We celebrate God our Father who loves us as he loves his Son Jesus Christ. God entrusts into our hands the world which God created in love.

17. A union of contemplative communities in the region of French-speaking Switzerland.

ASSEMBLY: *Lord, you are the source of life.*

LEADER: *We celebrate Jesus the Christ, our Lord, born of Mary into our human condition, who died and rose again in order to give us life.*

Still living among us, He gives us assurance that his light is brighter than the darkest night, that life triumphs over death.

ASSEMBLY: *Lord, you are the source of life.*

LEADER: *We celebrate the Spirit of Holiness which opens to us communion with the Father and the Son, and with one another, which gathers us in the church and pours out upon her every gift. The Spirit of holiness sends us into the world as witnesses of love and of life, as artisans of justice and peace.*

ASSEMBLY: *Lord, you are the source of life.*

LEADER: *We await the day when God will be all in all, day of unending light and the great feast of the kingdom for all peoples.*

ASSEMBLY: *Lord, you are the source of life.*

LEADER: *Will you leave all that leads to death and choose new life in Jesus Christ, promise to live as beloved children of the Father in the life-giving breath of the Spirit who makes us members of one body, the church?*

ASSEMBLY: *Yes, by God's grace.*

PROFESSION OF BAPTISMAL FAITH
Porto Alegre, 9th Assembly of the WCC

“Christ has risen from the dead; by his death he has vanquished death. To those in the tomb he has given life!” sing the Orthodox on Easter morning. It’s true, Easter is a fire kindled at the heart of our life, at the heart of our vocation to unity, to communion, to ecumenism.

Easter, the resurrection of Christ, is a home and a hearth of love. The presence of the Risen One burns in us, and burns us. It is the bubbling source, the energy, the power of new life. “He has risen, Christ my hope!” Each of us has discovered it personally. Our whole life, our existence to the very depths, has been turned upside down, reoriented; nothing is as it was before: “Who can separate me from the love of Christ?”¹⁸

At each new Easter sunrise, the Holy Spirit opens a little wider the ear of our heart. The dimensions of this event, of events are so vast for our life, our community, the church, for personal and collective life, our families, our countries, our churches . . . Easter compels us to let the Risen One illumine every fiber of our being: toward our interior, that microcosm that each of us is, and toward the exterior, toward the other, the others, toward all humanity and all the creation. Our consciousness expands; I open myself so I can truly see the other. I discover her to be different and yet so much like me—all these others, sisters, brothers, each one loved with a unique love.

And a prayer rises up within me: “May love be beloved by all.” From Christ, who conquered darkness and death, we draw the strength to resist the currents of death present in our world and in each of us. Each of our small personal victories, each opening of our hearts to love, has a healing influence on the Body of Christ, which is his church and, beyond the church, on the world. In the risen Christ, I become a being ever more alive, more free, stronger; and at the end of life, he will receive me/us into his glory!

Each Easter experienced intensely helps us to enlarge the tent of our hearts¹⁹ a bit more, to overcome the barriers we have set up between ourselves and others. The risen Christ, his presence in us, is the source of reconciliation within and around us: he is our peace. Not only on Easter, but every day! To live God’s today is to open ourselves each morning, at every moment, to the presence of the Risen One. Through a description of the Easter sunrise of 2006, it is a joy to share a bit of the liturgical intensity with which we celebrate year after year.

18. A personalization of Rom 8:35.

19. Allusion to Isa 54:2.

Easter Sunrise at Grandchamp

It is 4:30 in the morning; the sky is still dark. It has rained heavily, but the wind has chased away the clouds. Even a few stars are visible. In the entryway of *L'Arche* chapel, pilgrims from nearby and farther away are already gathering. Our retreatants, having come to us from the four corners of the earth, and with us since Wednesday of Holy Week, enter one by one. Together we follow Christ step by step through his passion into his death and resurrection.

The fire begins to burn, as yet slightly hesitant. The sisters arrive; our prioress, Sister Pierrette, carrying the pure white paschal candle. The pastors arrive. Everyone waits in breathless silence, filled with anticipation. The candle is lifted high: "O, You who sleep, awaken! Arise from among the dead. Upon you shall shine the light of Jesus Christ." Brother fire now burns brightly, illumining our faces. The chaplain carves the date on the candle, proclaiming: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. To him belongs all of eternity, to him the glory and honor forever and ever. Amen!"

"Light of Christ!" This proclamation pierces the night, opening the heart of this small gathering; from our hearts spring the beginnings of praise: "We give thanks to God!" The light spreads, like a delicate ripple of joy—from one candle to the next we pass it on from person to person, and sometimes several times, for the wind blows—but does not extinguish the flame! Light around us and light within; the fire of his love begins to burn within us.

We climb the stairs and enter the chapel, which is still in darkness: "Light of Christ!" On its stand, the paschal candle seems to dominate *L'Arche* and to be its center. Soon all is illuminated by the flickering candlelight. Near the paschal candle is the baptismal font. It will remain there until Pentecost, a tradition we discovered in the Trappist monastery of Tibhirine in Algeria.²⁰ This "Light of Christ!" and our response resounds one last time, completing our very first paschal "Alleluia!"

The choir announces, "Christ is risen!" and we all respond in song with the paschal greeting handed down to us from the earliest days of the church: "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" again and again, with great joy, as the people continue to enter. A sister sings the refrain of the paschal hymn of praise: "We praise you, splendor of the Father, Jesus Son of God!" and we all

20. Abbey of Our Lady of Atlas, Trappist monastery founded in 1938, closed in 1996. Seven of its monks were martyred in 1996 by Islamist insurgents during the Algerian civil war.

repeat it. The verses of the paschal praise are derived from the Easter Hymn of Saint John of Damascus (the liturgy of the Orthodox Easter vigil):

It is Resurrection day! Let the people rejoice in the Passover of the Lord, because it is from death to life, from earth to heaven that Christ our God has brought us, we who sing our joy . . . Let the heavens rejoice, Let the earth be filled with joy; Let all the world be festive, All the world, visible and invisible, because He is risen, Christ the eternal joy . . . Jesus has risen from the grave—as he told us. He has given us life eternal—and his great mercy.

The beauty of these hymns engraves their words on our hearts, each year more profoundly, and binds us more closely to the whole church. Several of our sisters have experienced an Easter Vigil with the Orthodox, the culmination of the Great and Holy Week, at Saint Serge in Paris, and in Lebanon with the Melkites, in Jerusalem and in Geneva—but also in Moscow, Zagorsk, and other places. Unforgettable experiences!

In the 1970s we began to integrate some of these elements into our liturgy, for through the liturgical intensity of the Eastern churches, we felt ourselves contemporaries of this great event, the resurrection: “Yesterday I was buried with you O Christ—I awaken today in you, the Risen One!” This reliving of the mystery of the resurrection, which intrigued me in reading Dostoyevsky, I have, and we have, experienced ourselves. The Easter liturgy was and remains for us extraordinary.

After the paschal hymn of praise, we sing again, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” as well as the Easter troparion (hymn) in numerous languages: German, English, Dutch, Russian, Greek, Chinese, and Malagasy; Italian, Swahili, Hebrew, Arabic, etc. Our chapel is in communion with the church all over the world, including the Orthodox Church, which is preparing for Easter as it begins the Great and Holy Week. Several of our sisters also participate in the Easter services at the Romanian Orthodox Church in Neuchâtel, for our relationship of prayer and friendship with them is growing.

Belonging to different peoples, we are truly united in the risen Christ: we sing of it together. Then we follow the Western tradition by the reading from the Prophets. This year (2006) there will not be any baptisms, but we will all renew our baptismal vows: “All you who have been baptized in Christ, you have been clothed in Christ, Alleluia!” This is followed by our profession of faith, inspired this year by the Assembly at Porto Alegre: “It is Easter today and the Resurrection of Jesus proclaims hope for new life. The rocks may tumble, tombs open forever, tears can be banished, fears are not eternal, joy comes for the downhearted, peace touches all heavy hearts.”

During the procession with the Book of Gospels, we sing again, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” in several languages. The Gospel is proclaimed, as at Christmas, from near the door—facing the whole world! After the Gospel reading in French, the core of this reading is repeated in every language of the people gathered in *L’Arche* chapel—fifteen languages in all. It is very moving to realize that the Good News has been proclaimed in all the earth by disciples of Christ, and that today, people come from other continents to evangelize old Europe . . .

After the kiss of peace, “The Peace of the Risen One!” given to all, comes a long procession of offerings. Among others, our Malagasy friend, the wife of one of the pastors, carries a cup to the altar, and the children bring flowers.

By the time we celebrate the Eucharist, the sun has risen. The birds add their singing to the Sanctus—yes, Easter is the celebration of all creation: “Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth celebrate, the whole earth and the entire cosmos, the visible and the invisible, for he is risen, the eternal joy!”

The hours go by, but does time still exist? We receive the Eucharist, Body and Blood of Christ! Like newborns we partake of this essential nourishment, the Sacrament of the Blood and Body of the one who gave himself for us and who is alive. He asked his Father to give unity to his disciples . . . right up until today: “I pray also for those who will believe in me: that all may be one . . .” In the diversity of this microcosm of humanity come from five continents to celebrate his resurrection here at Grandchamp, we are now profoundly united in him.

After the benediction, one more song: an *ostinato* from the Taizé song book—*Jubilate Deo*, introduced by the instruments. We can no longer keep still; first one sister then several begin to dance a *farandole* (an open line folk dance of southern France), and soon the whole assembly begins to dance in the open space before the altar. Rejoice!

The celebration continues with breakfast. Everyone is invited for a true *agape* feast. The sisters remain in white all day, as on their day of profession.

At dawn the Good News is announced by the angel to the women: “Go tell the disciples, Christ is risen and goes before you into Galilee!” In the evening we read the text which tells of the pilgrims of Emmaus who were joined by Christ himself in their grief. “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?” he asked. And they recognized him in the breaking of bread: “Didn’t our hearts burn within us when he opened the Scriptures to us along the road?” (Luke 24:26, 32). Yes, he is risen, Christ our hope!