

## **Association meeting CCA 17. - 23. April 2016**

### **Report of the German Federation**

#### **Setting out from Avila A Journey towards Communion**

- review
- a world in flames - challenges
- mentality of journeying together
- future prospects

Sr. Johanna and I feel privileged to be part of this meeting of your Association. I bring you cordial greetings from our German Federation and from Sr. Johanna's community in Dachau and from my sisters in Hannover.

We are very grateful to have contact with other Federations and Associations. We find it important in our time to share our experience and our life in our communities in a world that has changed so much. It was an enriching experience for our Federation to take part on the Association meetings in UK 2011, in USA 2012 in France 2013 and in Austria 2015, also the good and new experience with Google hangout about the questionnaire from Rome, the meeting during the General Chapter of our friars in Avila 2015 and Fr. General's meeting with 115 disalced carmelite nuns one day after celebrating the closing of the year of consecrated life in Rome.

#### **Review**

The convent of Tübingen, was dissolved in 2012.

2013 our community in Dorsten Lembeck relocated to Hannover.

2014 Carmel Hainburg was dissolved. The sisters went to Hamburg, where some of them had already founded a Carmel Cell some years before. Two sisters moved to another community in Germany.

Teresa Jubilee year

We believe that the sharing in the years before and during the Jubilee year of our Holy mother was very enriching. In 2012 and 2013 in preparation for the Jubilee year our Federation organized an ongoing formation session in Avila in the guest house of the Carmelite friars. Various Spanish Carmelites gave conferences on Teresa and John of the Cross. Over two days, our sisters visited the graves of our saints, John of the Cross in Segovia and Teresa in Alba de Tormes. The theme during the ongoing sessions in 2013 and during the prioress meeting was: what has Teresa to say to us as novice mistress and prioress?

- Exhibition "500 years Teresa of Avila - Story of a Friendship" in different cities
- 28. March 2015 Pontifical mass with Cardinal Marx in the Carmel Church in Munich, feast and meeting of the three branches of the Order and the whole Carmelite Family
- Presentation of the complete edition of the works of Teresa (translation by P. Dr. Ulrich Dobhan and Sr. Elisabeth Peeters)

#### **A world in flames - challenges**

Actually the European Union is undergoing a trying time. There exists statements, they say that Europe is in a condition of war. There is terrorism in Paris, Brüssel ... National

egoism dominates the right-wing populist parties. We are deeply concerned because an extremely nationalistic party (AFD) has experienced a very strong support in some German federal states. We hope that the people will be vigilant enough because these nationalistic party just claims to defend the Christian Occident although they represent neither the Christian values nor the Human rights.<sup>1</sup>

How can we help to integrate the refugees? The thousands of refugees awaken the readiness to help and develop a new quality of hospitality in Germany. A good number of people provide practical help, for example as volunteer teachers. Helpfulness could be a remedy against individualism and egoism in our society. Some of the Carmelite convents in Germany have already received refugees in their guest area.

It is our task today, not to see the challenges as a threat, but as an opportunity for us to discover the work of the Holy Spirit, who wants to open our eyes to the presence of God in our times.

In Germany we are noticing a great religious diversity, as a result of increasing migration. We meet people, who are not affiliated with any church, but longing for spaces of silence and spirituality. Can they find this space with us? Can we open up spaces, so they discover God in their hearts?

Refugees near our community in Hannover from Syria, Iraq and Africa come to our services in the monastery and they have contact with us. We celebrated the New Year's Eve 2014 together with two Christian families, two Muslims from Eritrea and two orthodox families from Ethiopia. We prayed together: It was a deep unusual experience for all of us.

We ask ourselves, how can we live our charism in our time? We have a rich spiritual heritage. We try to respond to this challenge through well prepared liturgies, periods of silence in our liturgical services and an offer of spiritual guidance as a response to the growing desire for spiritual accompaniment.

### **Mentality of journeying together**

Due to the challenges that are similar in most German convents (generation gap) we are also grown together. We are pleased to note that despite the diversity of our communities the acceptance and appreciation of each other has grown in recent years.

The better promotion of communication and unity between us is an important concern to which we pay special intention in our federation. With regard to the meeting in Rome 03 February with Father General we communicated via Internet and we deliberated how can we grow in unity in diversity and find a shared mindset.

Once a year the prioresses of each convent (federated and non federated) meet together. We decided to start inviting also the prioresses of the three convents of the 90 s Constitutions. Now all three take part and it is a very cordial meeting. But it sometimes seems a long way to find unity in diversity. Nevertheless we see the communication

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<sup>1</sup>Philippians 2:1-4

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

among our various convents as an important task in our Federation.<sup>2</sup>

## Future prospects

Our last General assembly of the federation in May 2014 had the theme: “Exodus: travelling with a promise. Departure – movement – letting go – a new start.” We dealt intensively with these topics. We find it important to reflect on the following question: How can we manage to recruit people for the life in a Carmelite order, to get a next generation of nuns? In Germany we notice that Carmelite convents with strict structures, i.e. with grilles, have more vocations than the others. It is a known fact that some young people who missed in their family a strong form of structure search for these structures and emotional bond in the monastery.

We believe that our open-minded way of life is a fruit and a sign of our Teresian charism.

In Germany we have a custom “Tag des offenen Klosters” in English we could translate it roughly as “Day of the open monasteries”. This took place in May 2014 and many of our convents participated. It was a good experience and we received a very positive feedback.

We can ask ourselves: what would be lacking in a world without the Carmelite spirituality? We would like to see ourselves as: Guardians and keepers of a God-filled silence, people of prayer, who let problems of our times touch us. Somehow we are people who live alternatively, outside of the consumer society.

We are nuns dedicated to God: we hope that we are capable of welcoming this “provocation” from God and we know how to give our whole lives in joy to do our part.

We need some visions. How do we get them? We have to consider our own way of life. *Timothy Radcliffe, Gemeinschaft im Dialog S. 227 ff.* says: “Our way of life must be the answer to the question: what’s about the reason for living today? People are being invited to recognize that spiritual way of life is a form of human existence in a good way. Spiritual life is a signpost to the future, living in community is a signpost to the human existence which is always connected”.

We could offer a new, but also old program of contemplative life. With the help of Pope Francis in his Apostolic script: *Evangelii Gaudium* we can begin a new step towards Christ: Number 264 and 265:

“The best motivation to decide to proclaim the Gospel is to look at it with love, remain for a long time by the text and to read it with the heart. What this requires is to regain a contemplative spirit, which helps us to discover every day, that we carry a good which makes more human and helps to have a better life.”

Thomas Merton says in his book: *New seeds of contemplation* (2007, New Directions Books) in his chapter: “To share the fruits of contemplation with others: Who know that God is always and everywhere present and willing to make himself manifest to whom they are loving him – these people will prefer the silence instead of the uncertain value of human actions.

Father General Saverios' proposal of formation of the person, which he gave us in Rome in February seems to me one of the most important tasks for the next years.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ephesians 4:1-6*

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one Lord and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

P. Saverio said to us: "As you have already understood, the proposal that I am presenting to you is an attempt to go to the root of our being contemplatives and Teresian, wherein resides the foundation of our unity and the truth of our identity.

It is only from these roots that it will be possible to acquire valid criteria that are not arbitrary or ideological in order to perform a serious and reasonable discernment regarding the innumerable questions that our life today presents us.

It seems to me that these roots do not consist in a style of life, spiritual doctrine, or in a particular activity.

The foundation is in the way of being of a person, or more exactly: the way in which the personal being allows herself to be transformed by a relationship with the person of Christ and with people who share this friendship."

Our German federation, Sr. Johanna and I thank you cordially for having given us this opportunity to share our spiritual journey with you.

Sr. Teresa Benedicta Rothkord, Carmel Hannover  
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