

## **PRESENTATION OF THE DUTCH FEDERATION AT THE CCA ASSEMBLY, APRIL 2018**

First of all I would like to thank you for your invitation to this CCA assembly. I had received an invitation on several prior occasions, but due to circumstances it had not yet been possible to come and participate in the assembly. I am glad to be here this time!

A long time ago, Sr. Joanna, the first President of our Federation and well-known to many of you, took part in the CCA assembly. I heard she made a big impression at the time. Sr. Ancilla took part several times and even spent three months in the United States after her Carmel in Haaren had been closed and her community had moved to Oirschot.

Sr. Ancilla is now 93 years old and she has asked me to pass on her most cordial greetings as well as her promise to pray for us.

We are very glad to be here together, Fr. Benedict and me, to get to know you all and to share our experiences.. To share our experiences on our way to Emmaus, a journey we are still making together. This week, too, we will be on the way together and we hope we may experience Jesus himself!

Fr. Benedict is not here in his capacity as former Provincial Superior, but rather as the President of our Federation's Supervisory Council. We will explain this in greater detail later on in this talk.

Due to circumstances, I myself have been President of the Federation for the last 14 years.

When I was elected, in 2004, we had 85 sisters living in 8 communities. At present, we have 36 sisters in three locations. Most sisters are very elderly but still strong in their Carmelite life and spirituality, even though, apart from in my own community, their lives look very different from the time when they embarked on the monastic life!

The course our Federation has taken until now has been and certainly is an Emmaus experience, all the way to today. In all those years – this year our Federation will have existed for 47 years – we discovered that God himself is our way. We had to cross many mountains and valleys, but He was near us throughout. Now, after 47 years, we look back in deep gratitude to God for the steps He has taken with us on our journey.

Let me outline the course our Federation has taken, in a nutshell:

- ! Around 1970 there were 12 autonomous Carmelite monasteries in the Netherlands. We had one foundation in Iceland and there were connections with Carmelite monasteries in Indonesia that had been founded from the Netherlands;
- ! In 1971 the Federation was formed, with the purpose of exchange, joint formation, consideration of policies for the future etc. Father Ignace Wishaupt ocd, who has been here in the US with Sr. Joanna several times, was appointed as Religious Assistant. He has fulfilled this office for 40 years. The Board was composed of the Federal Council and once every three years a Federal Assembly with representatives from all monasteries was held;
- ! From 1970 monasteries were gradually closed and amalgamations took place;
- ! At present, there are 35 sisters living in three separate locations:
  - the care home for religious and lay people De Beyart in Maastricht is home to 14 sisters;
  - 1 community in Oirschot is home to 9 sisters;
  - 1 independent community in Arnhem is home to 11 sisters.

In the nineteen eighties a community was founded in Maastricht for sisters in need of care. At the time the sisters themselves were given the choice whether to move to this community, which is called the Teresa monastery. The Teresa monastery comes under the responsibility of the Federation.

In the current setting, Arnhem and Oirschot are the result of a large merger of 4 communities, which took place about 1990.

Thus a place was created for healthy sisters in Arnhem and a place for elderly sisters and sisters in need of care was created in Oirschot.

At first in Oirschot there was a notable difference between the healthier sisters and the sisters in need of care, but over the years this distinction gradually faded, due to the sisters' progressive ageing.

In the course of the years the Federal Council's role became increasingly pivotal and it started taking over several duties of the autonomous monasteries. In 2007 the last Federal Assembly took place, which required two sessions. The reasons were that:

- ! No or virtually no women had entered the congregation in the Netherlands;
- ! The sisters' average age had become very high;
- ! The communities had no sisters left who could take up office on the Board;
- ! There were too few or no candidates left to constitute the Federal Council.

During the second session an important decision was taken.

#### **New governance structure for the Federation:**

- ! The Federal Council was to include non-carmelite nuns (and lay persons) as well;
- ! A Supervisory Council was formed;
- ! The position of Religious Assistant was abolished;
- ! One delegate (Superior) was appointed for each monastery.

This governance structure was carefully elaborated with the help of a lawyer who also drew up the new statutes.

The term "delegate" requires some explanation. Due to the sisters' advanced age it was no longer possible to hold elections. Thus the decision was taken to have one Superior appointed for all communities, called the Delegate. The Delegate lives in her own Carmel, from where she carries out her work on behalf of the communities. In consultation with the relevant community she appoints a vicar.

We had applied this structure as early as in 1999, when it applied to two communities in which elections were no longer possible.

At the time 3 members of the Federal Council, including myself and the Religious Assistant, visited the Congregation for Religious in Rome with the particular purpose of obtaining the delegateship. This was granted without problems.

Ten years later I travelled to Rome once more, this time with the Religious Assistant and the lawyer, in order to explain the new governance structure. Shortly afterwards, in September 2009, this structure was officially endorsed.

The President of the Federation – that is me – also became the Delegate for all communities (February 2010).

The new structure has been in operation from 2009. In accordance with the statutes the President had to be a Carmelite nun, as would be the Vice-President. The President of the Supervisory Council had to be a religious, preferably a Carmelite brother or sister.

In addition to me, two sisters took up office in the Federal Council, one of whom is the Vice-President. The other two members were not members of the Congregation, one of them a sister SCMM and the other a lay person. These two non-members of the Order were officially appointed by the Congregation for Religious through Father General.

The former Religious Assistant took up office as President of the Supervisory Council, with the other two members being lay persons.

For the second triennium, Fr. Benedict Cobben took over the position of President of the Supervisory Council from the former Religious Assistant.

This year will mark the end of the second triennium and we are making preparations for new appointments.

I am happy to say this structure is very effective, in particular because we have been able to attract people with the necessary expertise. In the coming years we will need more such people, as the Federal Council will increasingly have to take over responsibilities from communities.

The Federal Council receives support from an administrative assistant, ( a woman) and an adviser on finance, administration and the law.

All appointments are discussed with the communities, as far as still possible. Due to the sisters' advanced age it is becoming very difficult to communicate these topics effectively.

The Delegate has appointed a vicar to each community, in consultation with the community concerned. However, appointing a vicar is becoming highly problematic as well, as the sisters have become too old for such a post.

In **Arnhem**, the last community that is still functioning regularly, a process of internationalisation has been initiated. We would like to try for as long as possible to preserve the Carmelite spirituality in the Netherlands. As we founded the Indonesian Carmel from the Netherlands, (by now there are four Carmels in Indonesia and one in Dili on East Timor), we have had a connection to the Indonesian sisters for a long time.

So far the Indonesian sisters have thrived in our community, yet at the same time we have to consider the future once more, as the Dutch sisters have become older again in the meantime...

In **Oirschot**, there is currently no other option but to make plans with the care provider in order to ensure that the care home remains viable. This will require drastic measures.

The sisters are aware of this and respond admirably to the situation. As they have been doing from the onset of their life as Carmelite nuns, they trust that God will continue to lead them on their way.

The vicar is assisted by the location manager, who is seconded to the sisters for a number of hours a week.

In **Maastricht** one lay coordinator and an assistant have been appointed. The lay coordinator is the first contact person for two communities, because it was no longer possible to appoint a vicar.

When some of our monasteries were closed, it became all the more important to find a good destination for our patrimony and our archives. The archives have been

carefully described and, subsequently, deposited in the heritage centre for Dutch monastic life (*Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven*, website: [www.erfgoedkloosterleven.nl](http://www.erfgoedkloosterleven.nl)). We also considered it important that the history of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in the Netherlands would be properly described. This issue is currently being addressed.

There is much more to say on this topic, but it would take too much time. Please feel free to ask us any questions!

Our **international contacts** have been and still are important to us because of the opportunity to exchange experiences, as are the friendships that have developed over the years. In the future it will, however, become increasingly problematic for us to be away from home for a longer period of time. That is why we are all the more thankful that we have the opportunity to be with you now!

Looking back on the developments within our communities and the Federation we can only say that the whole journey has been an Emmaus experience to us. We often did not know which course to take, but we frequently experienced God's presence, often at crucial junctions, so that we could proceed on our way.

We hope and pray that our journey this week will bring us a true Emmaus experience, in which we may meet Jesus in each other.

Thank you for your attention.

Sr. Lucia o.c.d.