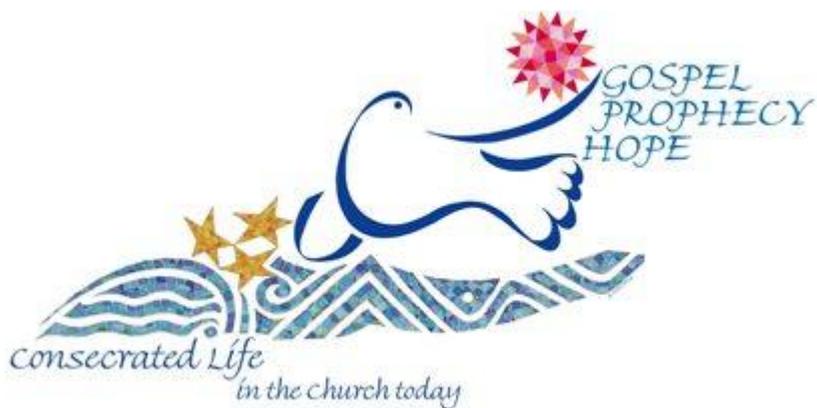


BASIC LETTER

June 2015



Maastricht, June 2015

Dear Sisters in Belgium, Brazil, East Indonesia, Indonesia, Kenya, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Tanzania, Timor Leste, the USA and Vietnam,

On June 26th, 2015, we commemorate the 151st death anniversary of our beloved Foundress, Mother Elisabeth Gruyters. It is a time for us to pause for a moment and reflect upon the wonder works of God through her and the Congregation that she founded. By observing her death anniversary we bring into our mind her life story and her great role in the Church, society and the Congregation. It is truly appropriate therefore, to deepen more and more her inspirational ways of life, her passion and big dream. Her life journey, her path in religious vocation in particular, tells us the story of God's miracle. The Congregation is very much blessed with her inspiring charism, vision and mission, the source of our Spirituality.

Her spiritual journey started with who Mother Elisabeth was and how she perceived herself. Although she considered herself uneducated and foolish, her writings and expressions about her relationship with the Lord make it hard for many to believe that she was illiterate. On the contrary, we consider that it was out of humility that she described herself as an uneducated woman. We are grateful for having a legacy of her own hand which depicts her life story. Through this handwritten story she has surprised us with many different perspectives of her deep relationship with God. Let us consider the following poem in which she describes herself.

‘Maria Elisabeth Gruyters

is my name

To serve God I am capable

to serve God I was born

if I do so: I won’t be lost

Maastricht, February 28th 1836’

We can feel how deep the relationship of Mother Elisabeth with God actually was. In this poem she first of all describes herself, what her personal insight of God is. She was very well aware of her preciousness in the eye of God. She grabbed the knowledge and acceptance that she is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1, 27). Therefore, she could say out loud who she was; ‘Maria Elisabeth Gruyters’ is my name. This name is not an ordinary one. It refers to her self-awareness and self-respect, of her dignity as a human being and of her sense of purpose.

Secondly, she narrated her dream in life. This woman named Elisabeth Gruyters is born to be competently serving God. Her deep intimacy with God enabled her to see the true meaning of her life. She was born from God and meant to serve God. However, we know very well that it was not easy for her to offer herself to fully serve God the way she would like to. She dreamt of serving God in a convent since it was the best way to fully dedicate her life to Him. It is not surprising, therefore, that she strived very hard to search for a religious community as the perfect place to serve God honestly and in perfection (cf. EG 5).

It was her very self-confidence that made her say: ‘to serve God I am capable’. However, her self-confidence also confronted her with the fact that she had to struggle quite a bit to make her dream to serve

God in a convent in Maastricht come true. Her assurance that she was capable to serve God needed to be tested and purified. Here we can see the process of her growth towards spiritual maturity. Mother Elisabeth went through this process of transformation. God allowed her to embark on a long journey of searching for His will. The path along which she journeyed was not easy. The path she had to tread on was not always straight and smooth, it was crooked and rough.

It was God who opened the eyes of Mother Elisabeth, who took pride in herself. Via a very long road, the Lord showed her His way, and not Elisabeth's choice. It seemed that God was teaching her to see that it was not her own capability but the Lord's. We have read what happened to her when she told her confessors of her longing for a convent. Their answers were totally out of her expectation. One of them said that she was too advanced in years and that she would not be on the expected list of candidates since there would be other people who would present themselves (cf. EG 19). One of the priests advised her to persevere in prayer because he did not know any convent that might admit her (cf. EG 12). Several convents that were contacted by her confessors did not even give her a chance (cf. EG 5). For Elisabeth who had strong confidence that she was capable of being the servant of God, this became a very painful experience.

How unsearchable are God's ways, how inscrutable His judgments. Mother Elisabeth strongly believed this. She had prayed faithfully for years yet, must go through a long and restless journey. She even had to experience the feeling of emptiness, of nothingness, of hopelessness and rejection. Her self-confidence was as if being crushed. Until, eventually, she reached the point where God seemed to turn the situation around. Once she was in the disposition to surrender everything to God and was ready to follow His will, God filled her emptiness with amazing grace. Mother Elisabeth did no

longer consider herself capable or competent to serve God, but let go of her dream and desire and surrendered herself totally to His will. It did not matter to her anymore how and who will be involved, as long as God is served faithfully and in perfection (EG 5). Her inner disposition was no longer 'I am capable' but 'that to the world I servant be' (cf. EG 39).

With her poem, Mother Elisabeth bequeathed to us a very valuable lesson of spiritual life. It is not in first instance about what we are all capable of doing or what we can offer to God nor is it about the ardent and continuous prayers that have to be heard and given. It's about none of this. It's about that we, just like our Foundress, need to learn to empty ourselves. Our self sacrifices should be honest and unconditional. We need to have an inner disposition that will let God's Spirit lead us in His way. We have to humble ourselves before God and have to be willing to give up everything e.g. to let go of our own desires, ambitions and dreams so that, in the end, God Himself uses us as an instrument to do His will. Mother Elisabeth went through this entire process so that finally God revealed to her His hidden plan. She should have the same experience as Jesus, her beloved, had when He, in times of helplessness, prayed to His Father e.g. not mine but your will be done. It was this situation He wanted to escape (cf. Lk 22,42).

Dear sisters, we need to learn from Mother Elisabeth to pursue spiritual maturity; need to learn about her transformation of heart. All the way... from taking pride in being a capable person to identifying herself with Jesus Crucified because of His obedience to do the will of His Father. Her spiritual maturity is marked by her openness to re-orient her goal that focuses on her egoism to the willingness to please and do God's will. This process towards spiritual maturity is mainly a gift from God. However, as we all know, it doesn't mean that she

didn't take part in it. For many years she tried her best to always be close to God. In her effort to take care of her relationship with God, she lived a disciplined life. She prayed fervently and oftentimes, with an abundance of tears, she practiced ascetic life, she was faithful to receive the sacraments, served the poor, listened to the word of God in the Bible and contemplated before the cross. She faithfully observed these spiritual exercises. We know very well that no matter how hard she tried if it did not please God, nothing will happen. It is God who took hold of her.

Right now, the situation in the world at large is more or less identical with the situation in Mother Elisabeth's time. She described that she lived in a worldly situation where she could see nothing else but blasphemous, immoral behavior and drunkenness (cf, EG 101 – 102). Spiritual life got less attention and people were more interested in worldly things. Religious life is less interesting, and even in the beginning of its establishment, the first CB community was mocked by many who discouraged the sisters and thought that their existence will end (cf. EG 53 & 55). The first CB community yielded an abundant harvest but was lacking in workers. The situation back then more or less compares with the situation of the world and the Congregation at present, don't you think?

In his letter to us on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis mentioned that the religious life faces many difficulties these days such as a decreasing number of vocations, an increasing number of ageing members, economical concerns, issues relating to globalization and internationalization, etc. All these problems are not unfamiliar to us. For, our Congregation experiences and faces a similar situation. Even during the time of Mother Elisabeth, as already described above, these issues occurred. Mother Elisabeth faced uncertainties since the beginning of the first community. Even

by the end of her story she mentioned that “things have not gone well in this interval and have not been going well up till now” (cf. EG 158).

Many good and wonderful things have happened to our Congregation. However, the words of Mother Elisabeth perfectly exemplify our present situation. Things have not been going well up till now. We are facing the same uncertainties as Mother Elisabeth did.

In the midst of all these uncertainties the Pope invites us to have faith, to embrace the future with hope and to not be afraid for, God is always with us. One might question if this invitation makes sense or that it is just wishful thinking. How can we stay hopeful when seeing that the Congregation has past its prime, when the number of members is decreasing and the newcomers are only few, whereas the demands of apostolic ministries are challenging and the modern world seems to continue to challenge us?

Mother Elisabeth encouraged us with her belief ‘If I do so: I won’t be lost’. We must try and acquire her strong faith in living present-day life and in facing the future of our Congregation. We must continue living out her spirituality faithfully. The strong foundation of the Congregation is its spirituality, the work of God’s SPIRIT as experienced by Mother Elisabeth. This well-built foundation is mainly the work of God, not of human creation. It is our responsibility to bring it forth and pass it on to the next generation, the future generation. This Spirituality life enables and inspires us to serve God faithfully and in perfection. If we do so, just like Mother Elisabeth, we won’t be lost. Mother Elisabeth sailed safely through all the difficulties and trials she faced on her way through life. She never lost faith and hope. That is why God could perform His miracle in her. We believe that the same God continues to perform His

miraculous works in our Congregation. Do not be afraid, God is with us.

We wish you all a blessed celebration of the death anniversary of Mother Elisabeth. God Bless us.

Happy Feast Day!

IN MEMORIAM

As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the Face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, "Where is your God." (Psalm 42)

Sr Philomène Cornelissen was born on May 27th, 1919 at Sint Agatha, the Netherlands and passed away on May 30th, 2015 in Kloosterhof, Maastricht.

MEMBERSHIP

Three sisters from the Province of Indonesia will take their final vows on August 9th, 2015.

They are:

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| 1. Name | : Sr Chrismerry Merry Darmiati |
| Place & date of birth | : Labasa, Muna, 28 Febr. 1988 |
| Parish of origin | : St Michael, Labasa, Sulawesi |

2. Name : Sr Laurisa Anastasia Helena Pujawati
 Place & date of birth : Bandung, 22 January 1983
 Parish of origin : St Michael, Waringin, Bandung
3. Name : Sr Melina da Costa Santos
 Place & date of birth : Dili, 24 May 1988
 Parish of origin : The Sacred Heart of Mary, Oe'ekam, Timor Leste

We congratulate these three sisters. Let us accompany them with our prayers so that they will be faithful in their calling. May the name of the Lord be glorified for ever and ever.

The Philippine Region

The 6-rooms expansion of the kinderschool in Tagaytay including the covered court are now finished and ready to be used for the opening of the school year in June. They were blessed with the presence of the sisters on June 1st, 2015. We congratulate the sisters in this Region. We hope that through this school the sisters can plant a good seed in the hearts of many children as Mother Elisabeth did.



The school



Logo



The covered court

Vietnam unit

Sr Kadien, our Vietnamese Junior who has followed her initial formation in the Philippine Region, returned to Vietnam on June 15th, 2015. After her novitiate she was granted the opportunity to study in the area of catechism. She will strengthen the community and apostolic ministry in Vietnam. We pray that, together with the sisters in Vietnam, she will be able to share the spirituality of the Congregation in her own country.

East Indonesian Region

On the anniversary of Mother Elisabeth's death, June 26th, 2015, the East Indonesian Region will have the Carolus Borromeus Hospital in Bello, Kupang, blessed. This hospital was started with a small clinic only for outpatients. Seeing the need of the people, it has gradually been developed into a clinic with 27 beds for inpatients. Right now this clinic has become a type D hospital with 50 beds. This development was done to meet the requirement standard from the Department of Health.

We congratulate the sisters in the East Indonesian Region for their courage, hard work, perseverance and faith which enabled them to build this hospital. We hope that the sisters with all the facilities in this hospital can serve the people even better. May the name of the Lord be glorified in their sincere service.



The Emergency Room



The front side of the hospital



The ward

ORIENTATION

Sr Kadien and Sr Phuong, Junior Sisters from Vietnam, will have their orientation in the Province of Indonesia. They will arrive in Jakarta on August 2nd, 2015. This orientation will give them the chance to have experience in various apostolic ministries and communities. At the same time they will deepen and share their spiritual lives to their fellow sisters in Indonesia. We wish them a fruitful orientation.

Kind regards
on behalf of the General Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sr Rosaria Nur Hardiningsih'.

Sr Rosaria Nur Hardiningsih
General Superior