

RENEWAL GROUP - COME AND REST A WHILE

COMMUNICATION 3

18 May 2016

Dear Sisters,

Greetings from Rome. On Pentecost Sunday, we concluded the renewal session and we thank you for your support of us in various ways. We would like to share with you some of our reflections in this third and final newsletter. It is a bit long because it goes through from part of April to May. We hope you will enjoy reading.

Our visit to Taize

It was a long journey and the day turned wet and cold but that did not dim the experience we had: hundreds of young people praying as one in silence and song. The most beautiful setting of the central altar and Mass was truly heavenly. After mass we visited Br. Roger's grave—so simple, a bare wooden cross and simple flowers, a loving and peace-filled place. *Yvonne*



To give us some idea of the “Normandy Landings” (D-Day 6th June 1944) which we would in some way experience during our stay in Caen – we watched the film “Saving Private Ryan”. It was concerned with the American place of landing- the Omaha Beach- but of course the allies were from many countries. The film was rather “bloody” but gave us a glimpse of what “hell” war is and what sacrifices were made to save Europe and the rest of the world from Nazi occupation.

Journey to Caen!

It was an early start and of course, raining, but spirits were not dampened. Some had to walk down to St. Rambert while others had lifts with the luggage and looked after it until the coach arrived- a very colourful, modern one - a blessing on such a long journey. Our driver's name was Frank and we soon found out what a “treasure” we had in him.

Our first stop on the way was VEZELAY where stands proudly, on the Eternal Hill, the beautiful medieval Basilica, the Church of St. Madeleine. We entered through the HOLY DOOR OF MERCY and inside we saw carved in wood, a group of pilgrims- like ourselves! There are many “Pilgrim Churches” in France, where Christians who could not afford a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, were able to make a prayerful journey to a holy shrine. We spent an hour in this special place and its environs though rain deterred us somewhat, especially when trying to find somewhere to eat our lunch. However, Euphrasie was looking after us and we found a dry spot to enjoy a much-needed “re-fuelling”

We had one more stop on the way - the driver more than anything, needed a rest - perhaps from our singing, for we had been singing hymns and songs most of the time. Eventually at 7pm we arrived at our much anticipated destination, CAEN. There was a great welcome awaiting us. Some of the



Sisters there came running out of the monastery gate to welcome us (complete in their full-length grey habits, red scapulars, black veils and white wimples) and to help us with our luggage. So we became part of the community of the Monastere de l'Annonciade a Grentheville. After a hearty supper the Prioress invited us to see the Chapel, designed by the Community themselves. Words cannot describe its beauty and sense of being totally at peace with the whole of creation. We were told that there were three days for the opening of the chapel so that everyone in the

village and those who had worked on the building could be included.

Saturday April 24, began with breakfast at 8am and by 9.15am we were all on board the coach and ready to set off to the City of Caen. Our first port of call was the Church of St. Giles where Euphrasie was baptised on the day of her birth, 4th January 1829. The Church, sadly, is no more. A small portion of it stands in ruins. Still, what remained was very precious to us and we felt close to the tiny baby, Euphrasie, at the beginning of her missionary journey.



Close by this spot is the Church of the Holy Trinity of the Abbey for Women. In 1059 William of Normandy and his wife Mathilde de Flanders, each founded a Benedictine Abbey – the Abbey for Men –dedicated to St. Etienne and the Abbey for Women –dedicated to The Trinity. The Religious left the Abbey in 1791 and the Women's building became a Hospice for poor. This is where Euphrasie's mother died of rabies, RIP. It was a poignant moment standing and looking. Over the door of the Church of The Trinity is an imposing but inspiring sculpture of The Trinity. Was this where Euphrasie began her thoughts and reflections, for she would have passed under it many times??

We went next to the 11 o'clock Mass in the Church of St. Pierre, where Euphrasie had made her first Holy Communion on the Feast of the Holy Trinity when it is assumed she was nine or ten years old. It was here too that Euphrasie hearing the words of a Missionary Bishop speaking of the foreign missions, ran into the sacristy to ask, or rather to tell him that she was ready to enter a Convent and to go on the Missions. We were shown the favourite spot where Euphrasie used to sit, kneel and pray. Some of us sat there and had pictures taken.

While all this was going on Maureen was introducing herself, on behalf of the group to Father Michel who, fortunately for us was replacing that day. He insisted on greeting each of us by name and was so impressed by our history and internationality that he involved us in the Liturgy, Jacqueline helped take up the collection; Bich Quyen distributed Holy Communion; Lucy read the Gospel in English and Maureen spoke of who and what we were, explaining our presence in the Church and in Caen. At the end of the Mass we were invited up to the altar to face the Congregation and were given a great ovation. We were then asked to remain there so that people could come and talk with us. The Young Lady Scouts were also part of our group. It was truly wonderful and heart-warming to be the bearers of the good news that their city had been so blessed with the gift of a Missionary Woman whose Congregation has now spread across the world and numbers a thousand Missionaries.

How to follow this? Well, after a rest and lunch we visited the Abbey of the Men and the Church of St. Etienne. Here, on the steps of the high alter lies the tomb of William Duke of Normandy later the conqueror and King of France and England.

Next we paid a quick visit to Louvigny where Euphrasie spent her early childhood on the small farm of her maternal Grandmother. We tried to find her grave in the grounds of the Church but unfortunately, although there were some ‘Leclerc’s buried there they would only have been distant relatives.

On arriving home and after supper, we joined the Sisters for Compline and spent some quiet time together sharing our experiences of the day. No guessing which came TOP! *Helen and Yvonne*

A Personal Reflection on the Pilgrimage to Caen

Coming from different continents, languages and cultural backgrounds, we visited Caen with songs of joy and excitement. Recalling memories that I have learned about Euphrasie Barbier during my early formation stages, perhaps we all have dreamt of the opportunity to visit Euphrasie’s homeland. This dream now became a reality for me. On the bus to the Euphrasie’s homeland, each one of us held within our hearts our own wishes, desires, prayer intentions... I was excitedly waiting to see the place and put my feet on the land where Euphrasie grew up - holy ground for me. I could not hold my tears when I stood on that sacred ground.



Sr. Maureen McBride lead us to the Church where Euphrasie was baptized. There was a deep silence in the heart of everyone when we saw the little remain of the church which was destroyed during the war. It was emotional to stand on this sacred ground. Euphrasie’s life stories one by one played back in my mind, alive and vivid....Euphrasie! “We kneel down in memory of you, to pray for the Church and the congregation.”

Visiting places like the house where Euphrasie was growing up, her parish and the village of her grandmother where she spent a few years of her early childhood, the church of the Trinity, the abbeys in surrounding area, helped us to understand more deeply Ephrasie’s spirituality and charism. It was very touching to see Euphrasie’s favorite spot in the parish where she experienced God’s inspiration to be a religious missionary. We could picture in our mind a little girl running to the sacristy asking the Bishop to go on mission. It is amazing to see the Gift of God that she initially received now has bloomed and spread globally. Fr. Michel and the parishioners warmly welcomed us. The friendliness and joyful interactions with them make us feel like being at HOME, not strangers in this land.



The Sacristy door where Euphrasie met the Bishop

The highlight of my pilgrimage to Caen is the strengthening of my sense of belonging to our international congregation. I value and cherish more deeply my RNDM vocation. I wish that every RNDM sister, once in a lifetime, has an opportunity to visit the birth-place of the congregation and of our Foundress’. It was a valuable trip and a memorable time. *M. Gioanna Nhung*



The 25th was spent mostly in Lisieux, first to the Basilica which is extremely beautiful, light and colourful. One could spend hours there but we had to move on to Carmel, the monastery where we saw how Therese lived, and the clothes she wore and the things she used, and best of all her writings. We spent time savouring all this and prayed at her tomb- such a young beautiful woman who became such a great missionary in such a short time.

The next visit was a great contrast- a museum where the famous Bayeux Tapestry is displayed and which depicts the famous Battle of Hastings 1066 fought between William of Normandy and Harold, to succeed Edward the Confessor as King of England. Considering the length of the Tapestry-seventy metres- and the intricacies of the stitches it is a real masterpiece telling the story of the battle in great detail and interspersed with humour. We each had an audio recording of the story.

Another battle story- this time on the beaches of Normandy, Omaha where the Americans made their landing and where at least 250,000 lost their lives. We saw the remains of the bridges there which were built to help in the landings and again they were another reminder of the devastations of war, and this 2nd World War in particular. We visited the American Cemetery. Hundreds of white crosses stretching out as far as the eye could see- and all these young men sacrificed themselves that the rest of the world might be free.

26 April was another very early rise, and we were making our way to Caen Railway Station for a great separation. Sisters going to Lourdes would leave the coach taking the other to England. It was hard having to part like this, but the Sisters going to Lourdes could not get Visas for England- they were Rebecca and Mai Trin of St. Rambert Community, Minita and Bibiana from Bangladesh, Mai Linh, Minh Nha, M.Paula and Gioanna from Vietnam, Felistus from Kenya, Bich Quyen (CLT) and Helen and Yvonne (England).

Learning that there was a national transport strike that day we were fortunate to catch an earlier train than anticipated, arriving in Paris three hours later. As there was another wait for our train to Lourdes we did a tour of Paris with our luggage! Not too bad considering- we visited the famous Sacre Coeur (Montemarte), a fine white basilica on the hill which can be seen for miles around. Then we went on the Metro to the famous Rue du Bac where Our lady appeared and gave Saint Catherine Labouré the Miraculous Medal. It is a remarkable centre of prayer. Then we went to the Church containing the tomb of St. Vincent de Paul, placed above the high altar, strangely enough.



We had a long, long walk to the station to get the only train going to Lourdes that day. Thankfully we arrived early for there was such a scramble for seats- even those booked by other people. The journey took about three hours and it was 8pm when we arrived at Lourdes and getting dark too. We stayed in one hotel (more of a hostel for it hadn't the same conveniences and comfort one would expect). Bich Quyen and Mai Trinh went out for our food. By that time it was 10 o'clock and we were quite tired and hungry but that didn't stop us from eating well.

As there was no breakfast at the hostel, we dined out on 27th! We then found our way to the Ave Maria Hotel. This was different and we soon settled in, in comfort. We then had Mass (in Italian) in the main Basilica and oriented ourselves. This wasn't so easy as there were many groups of students moving about and singing their hearts out. At times things seemed rather noisy and chaotic and it was hard to find somewhere to pray quietly. It was half-term for schools and about 10,000 French students (older ones) gather every two years for a pilgrimage to Lourdes. They certainly were enthusiastic in all that they did. In the evening we all had supper together at a small restaurant and some of us went on to the torchlight procession.

On 28th, we met again at St. Michael's Gate to attend a Mass in English in the small chapel of Saints Cosmos and Damian, celebrated by a Filipino SVD. Thinking him to be a Marist Father we told him our story of connection. He did know about our Sisters in PNG but had not worked with them.



Next we followed in the footsteps of St. Bernadette- visiting her birthplace, the Church where she was baptised and the old 'jail' which became her home when her father's business went bankrupt. After all this a time of quiet prayer was needed and some of us found a quiet, warm beautiful chapel of Adoration. What a joy. Others went around the many shops but we all gathered for a meal together at our hotel followed by a second torchlight procession.

Friday the 29th Up "bright and early" once more for we were leaving Lourdes. It was a short visit but we saw and did all we wanted. We filled in our Year of Mercy 'Passports' and had done most things recommended. Only one good Sister went to the baths though she had to wait 3 hours. Before leaving some went to the 6.45 am Mass at the Grotto- something really special and a fine finish to the pilgrimage.

Our train connection in Paris gave us 3 hours to eat a delicious lunch of our choice and relax in a quiet, fairly comfortable waiting room. When our train home arrived we found we were upstairs- a new experience, but no fun with all the luggage. The change in Lyon was easy NO WAITING. The bus was there at Amberieu and M. Laurent and Mary Elizabeth awaited our arrival in St. Rambert and whisked us off home to a lovely hot meal. Each of us has a different story to tell about this part of our pilgrimage- a story which is still unfolding..... *Helen and Yvonne*

Pilgrimage to England



Leaving the Lourdes group and moving on to Calais was sad for a little while. But we became excited at the thought of taking the ferry to England - for some of us it was like a "TITANIC" experience. We had the privilege of being in a lounge at the front of the ferry which gave us a great view. We were also served complementary drinks which was all unexpected. Most of the time, some of us stood to enjoy the

beautiful sight, taking photos. We were thrilled when we caught sight of the white cliffs of Dover.

Arriving at Dover a coach was waiting for us arranged by Kathleen from Deal. In less than an hour we were in Beech Court and we were delighted to meet the whole community who were also happy to welcome us. We soon gathered in the dining room for a delicious meal. In the evening with the sisters, we all gathered in the community room and shared our stories and news of our missions. The following morning sisters Kathleen and Rose Ann took us to St. Mary's school where the RNDMs had taught for many years. The sisters still have very close connection with the school. We also saw the beautiful work of the children and a mosaic on the wall depicting the footsteps of Mother Foundress in Deal when she first arrived in 1870 to take over the orphanage which was then run by Miss Boys. We visited the Parish church and the Parish Priest invited us to pray a decade of the Rosary together after which we had Mass with the community.



A visit to the cemetery was important for us to see where so many of our early sisters and Miss Boys are buried. We prayed for them and thanked God for their contribution to the Congregation. We also saw the original site of the orphanage, convent and chapel which Mother Foundress had built because of increased numbers of sisters and orphans.



The next morning we went to Sturry where we were longing to go. It was like a dream come true to be there. First Nicola, the archivist talked to us and showed us the actual habit of Mother Foundress. Some of us went to the chapel while others went to Euphrasie's room and had the privilege of seeing the chair in which she died. It was wonderful to see all the things which she used..... like the discipline, rosary, prayer book etc. It was awesome! A great moment of the day was when we all gathered in the chapel for the beautiful and meaningful liturgy prepared by Rose Mary Harbinson. Each one was given a candle and we were invited to pray for our special intentions as we placed our candle on the tomb. We were quiet overwhelmed by this and it was hard to keep back the tears.....

We visited the elderly sisters in St. Anne's community and in spite of their illness they were very happy to see us. Vera Burns who had been working in India was happy to speak a few words in Khasi and in Hindi. We had a very short visit to Canterbury Cathedral on the way to London. In the evening we arrived in Wealdstone community where all the sisters welcomed us lovingly. The next morning Sr. Rose Mary took us to London by train to visit the first house where Euphrasie started her mission and other places where she worked. We were privileged to see the grave of Fr. Faber who was the Superior of the Sisters of Compassion. We were very happy to see Buckingham Palace, though we missed seeing the Queen! We are very grateful to Sr. Rose Mary for her accompaniment and all the description of London especially the historical places of RNDMs. A big thank you to Margo and all the sisters



in the UK and Ireland province for your warm welcome and wonderful hospitality. We really enjoyed our pilgrimage to England! *Phulkeria, Maria Goretti & Lourdes Mary*

Retreat

To conclude our time in France, we entered into retreat directed by Marie Benedict and Maureen. This was the highlight of our program which took us deep down. Everything was done for our comfort and this gave us enough time to reflect and to rest in God. Marie Benedict gave us reflections in the mornings which were all based on the life of Euphrasie, the congregation and the scriptures. This gave us enough thoughts for the day. In the afternoon, Maureen led us through a sharing in the group which we found very inspiring. She also prepared the liturgies which were very rich as they enabled us to reflect further on the theme for the day. All of us were enriched as we



listened to the whispering of the Spirit within us and around us. On the last day, we concluded with the sharing and anointing of each other which was very touching. On Saturday, we had a closing liturgy led by Lucy which was very touching and meaningful.

We are grateful to all who made this program a very rich time for us. *Minita*

Pilgrimage to Rome

On 9th May, we all left St. Rambert for Rome, the “Eternal city” and despite being on different flights, we all arrived safely. We were welcomed by the community and were soon enjoying a very hearty dinner.

Next morning, we had a beautiful morning prayer and by 9.30, we were on our way to continue our pilgrimage in the footsteps of Euphrasie guided by Carmel and accompanied by Lucy. Our first stop was at the Basilica of St. John Lateran where we had mass. From there we proceeded to the Basilica of St. Mary Major. Euphrasie had visited these churches on her many visits to Rome.

On Wednesday the 11th, we set off early at 7 am for the Pope’s Audience and we were all excited to see the Pope even though it was at a distance. We had a long wait at the security points as there were hundreds of people already waiting when we arrived. We eventually found ourselves being escorted into the seating area since we had a special ticket and our tired feet found some rest. Before the pope entered the square he had stopped in at the Pope Paul VI’s hall to meet those in wheel chairs. Among these lucky ones in the front row was sheeba accompanied by Joyce. Then our wait was over when Pope Francis appeared in his Pope mobile. Our excitement was great and the whole square was full of loud acclamations “...Papa Francisco...” He later moved to the platform where he spoke to us. The Gospel of the “Merciful Father” was read in several languages and Pope Francis spoke on the mercy and love of God for His people. We left St. Peter’s square, delighted to have seen our Holy Father. We then



proceeded to the third Major Basilica of St. Paul outside the wall, another magnificent creation and where the Tomb of St. Paul is. After some time for prayer, we proceeded to Tre Fontane the place where St. Paul was beheaded. We returned home in the evening and though it was a long journey and the feet were tired we were glad for the experience of the day.

On 12th, we left the house for the Gesu Church, a Jesuit Church where we saw the relic of St. Francis Xavier and the Tomb of St. Ignatius of Loyola, great Jesuits saints. This Church and the Church of Ara Coeli were the Churches where Euphrasie and her companions often went for Mass as they were very close to 18 Piazza Margana where they stayed with the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparitions.

On 13, on the feast of Our Lady of Fatima we headed for the St. Peter's Basilica with Crescencia as the guide accompanied by Joyce. We left early so as to beat the crowds and we arrived on time to attend mass in the Blessed Sacrament chapel. From there we climbed up the 1000 steps of the Dome (Cupola) and experienced a magnificent view of the city of Rome. We then had a good time to wander around the Basilica and once again enjoy the great work among them the beautiful Pieta by Michelangelo. A visit to the crypt and to the tombs of the Popes ended our time in the Basilica. This ended our pilgrimage in Rome with each carrying her own special experience with a heart full of gratitude for a wonderful opportunity, a once – in – a - life time event.



In the evening of 14th, we had a beautiful evening prayer and re-missioning back to our provinces led by Josephine Kane, our congregation leader. Pentecost day, our Patronal feast was also a great opportunity to celebrate the silver jubilee of our six sisters, it was a beautiful celebration.

We once again express our gratitude to all of those who have been part of our pilgrimage. Our gratitude to our Provinces who prepared us for these experiences, the various communities in France, England and Rome who offered us great hospitality, may God bless each one of you. ***Helen, Phirmina and Cecilia***