



Common Letter No. 22
M. Angela Strobel, OSB
April 22, 2010

Dear Sisters!

The 125th Jubilee IWE participants fill our Casa with life, joy and a real sense of our unity in plurality. Providentially, this year all our Pories are present. Since several years we have once again a German Group. The Lusofonic (Portuguese speaking) group is bigger than ever, and even Angola is here for the first time. Moreover, we have our brand new Casa Coordinator coming from Ndanda Pory; our youngest Casa Community member, Sr. Angela Barreti from Sorocaba Pory just arrived. I see this international community as a special jubilee gift and enjoy observing this “inter-pory sharing”: how they communicate across cultural and language barriers, sometimes à la Italia, with hand and feet.

These days a cloud hovered over Europe. “The cloud really exists” says one of the newspaper headlines. What is meant is the cloud of volcanic ashes coming from Iceland which kept the airplanes on the ground. Yet, another cloud exists, at this time, brought to our painful awareness by the media, a murky cloud that darkens the sky of our church and, in particular, of our religious communities: the child abuse in catholic institutions. This reality brings to my mind a concern and confirmation.

Most of the cases happened years ago. My concern is, can these “ashes” blown up now bring real healing and, above all, do they perhaps prevent us to see what goes on in our days? For sure, we can accept it as a chance for healing. “There is a time for healing wounds, and that time is now”, says a song. Pope Benedict, who is particularly attacked, pronounced one of his wise words addressed to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Biblical Commission last week. He spoke of the nearness of penance and grace because it is a grace to recognize the sins and to recognize the need of renewal and change. *To be able to do penance is a gift of grace. This is valid for so many Christians who, in recent times, frequently avoided the word penance, because it seems too severe. Today, in the face of the world’s attacks which highlight the sins of the members of the Church, we experience the grace to be able to do penance and the need to do penance, to recognize how much went wrong, open ourselves to pardon and let ourselves be transformed.* One word in this short statement struck me particularly. Not so long ago a Sister really and truly told me that I must not use the word penance in a visitation report because it is not used anymore. And yet, in theory, we always profess that we are sinners: “I confess...”, we pray daily. St. Benedict long ago saw his community as a community of sinners. - There is a time for penance and grace and that time is now!

Very seldom can I remember my dreams, but when I do so, the dream has something to say. Some weeks ago I had one - may I share it with you? *In the dream, the Abbot Primate was accused of terrorizing all the passengers on the train going from Munich to St. Ottilien. Somebody asked: What did he do? Answer: He did not do anything, he was simply wearing his pectoral cross!* Maybe you also find an interpretation?!

An excerpt from a commentary on the role of the mass media in all this, coming from a continent other than Europe, might enable us to see through the “cloud”. It comes from a Brazilian Franciscan Priest and has the title “Scandals in the Church”

Each religious institute, although recognizing its own sins, cannot deny its function of a collective moral conscience. This bothers a society which does not admit moral limits to its greed for profit. Part of the media concentrates on the morbidity of sexual abuses and keeps silent before the abuse of political economics that produce marginalization and hunger of millions of people. Finally, the life of innocent children killed in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq also appeal to the human conscience as much as the victims of pedophilia. (Fr. Aloisio Fragozo OFM).

More than half of our Jubilee year is gone. Probably you are thinking already of the closing celebration. We in the Generalate have yet to complete our task: the edition of the so called "Pioneers' Book". It is much research and work. For sure it will not be ready for September 24, 2010. Yet I can envision it as a gift to us, to our friends and the people we serve. Among the about 50 – 100 Sisters, there are more than just a few saints. May they help us in this endeavour!

In our Casa Santo Spirito we are reading at table again the History written by Sr. Bernita Walter. From this book, the name Gerard van Caloen, a companion of Fr. Andreas in Maredsous, mentioned several times, is not unknown to you. In February an e-mail addressed to our Guesthouse was forwarded to me, reading: *Dear Sister, My name is Bernard-Marie van Caloen, I am a Trappist monk at Mont des Cats, France. Probably you never saw me... but I am writing to you in the hope that you can help me. In 2004 I was member of the Monastic Formators Program organized for the Benedictine monks and nuns. During our stay in Rome we were invited to visit the Generalate, with Sister Juana Maria Rivera who was member of the staff. I was surprised to see the "family tree" of your congregation on the wall of the entrance of the Generalate. Looking at the tree, I was again surprised to see one of the first foundations in Olinda in 1903 or so. Well... It was my grand-grand-uncle who invited your congregation to help him in the missionary work in Brasil where he had been sent to restore the Benedictine congregation. His name was Dom Gerard van Caloen.....* (the reason for his petition for help was a photo of the tree for a book he is writing).

In the life-stream of history, I can give you some updates and ask for your prayerful help. Since the end of March, Sr. Antoinette Adelman has been with us. It is good that she can rest and gain some weight, but the unfortunate side is that she is required to stay out of India for two months before she can re-enter the country, in spite of a 10 years' visa. The new regulation seems to be that foreigners have to be out every six months and to stay outside the country for two months. How we can handle this at this point in time is unknown to me. Rajkot urgently asks for a nurse-tutor. Manila has agreed to the Generalate's request to send Sr. Monica Nabirye to Rajkot. Whether Sr. Monica will get a visa is uncertain.

In February, I visited Bulgaria with Sr. Hildegard Jansing. Sr. Stanislava Bratanova is bedridden since a stroke she suffered on Ash Wednesday. Although everywhere we talk about a "lack of Sisters", here it is a hard reality. We have requests for Sisters, yet the "supply" is meager. Besides the big movements of Prioresses and Regional Superiors last months involving Norfolk, Portugal, Spain, Angola, Windhoek, Sorocaba, Argentina and Manila, we can now report on the missioning of Sr. Juana Maria Rivera from the Philippines to Jinja, Uganda, Sr. Irene Iita from China, Meihekou back to Windhoek and Sr. Mirjam Schweiger, also from China, back to Tutzing. Others are not yet definite.

For the next months I will be on the move: It starts with the Assembly of the UISG (Union of Superiors General) from the 7th to the 11th of May, here in Rome. The Theme is: *Drinking' from the fountain that springs forth and flows... although it is night (St. John of the Cross)*. On May 12, God willing, my mother will celebrate her 100th birthday, and I will be there. On June 3, Sr. Adelaida and myself will fly to China for some days. Sr. Maoro flies ahead and then awaits me in Korea for the visitation in Seoul Priory.

I hope I can write you again before my second semester busy schedule starts: CIB Symposium and closure of our Jubilee Year in September. Then, in October will begin the visitation in Daegu Priory and will last until the first months of 2011.

For all this I really count on your prayerful support.

With love,

Sr. Angela OSB