



Notre Dame de Sion

“SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”

Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem

Ein Karem, Monday, 09 November 2015

REFLECTION ON THE TWO YEARS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL NOVITIATE JANUARY 2014 TO NOVEMBER 2015

Dear Sisters,

Juliana arrived in Jerusalem on the 13 of January 2014, and had a period of two weeks in which to prepare our living space for the next 2 months, since the building that was to become the Novitiate was still being renovated. We were able to move in, finally, at the beginning of April 2014. In the meantime, the Novices had begun to arrive, the first on the 29th of January and the last on the 14th of February. Our Community was made up of Sr. Colette, Sr. Michelle from Belgian (for 3 months), Sr, Juliana, and the novices; Sr. Ivone joined us in July 2014.

During our Orientation Time we lived in the Ein Karem Guesthouse, using rooms 2, 8, and 9, and room 13 as our community room as well as Juliana's bedroom. Orientation Time was basically a period in which we began to get to know one another; it was a significant experience that allowed us even the luxury of simply “wasting time” together. Living together, 24 hours a day, with the novices sharing rooms, we discovered how much we could enjoy one another. During that time too, we prepared many things for our new house and we began to establish how we wanted to live together, sharing the shopping and other responsibilities, and reflecting together on how we wanted to organize our schedule. Juliana gave us some input on religious life and we shared our vocation stories, we studied the Hebrew Alphabet and the Shoah with Sr. Michele, and spent time in Ecce Homo visiting the holy places around Jerusalem. We engaged in getting to know the different faces of Judaism by listening to lectures or walking around Jerusalem.

We began the tradition of replacing the expression “recreation time” with “coffee time” for what happened at 3 pm. During that time, we would read a passage from one of the Origins of Sion books on Fr. Theodore's life, letters, instructions, and reflections. We also learned how to knit socks or gloves and even a pullover, or began to make covers for our Bibles. With this Recreation/Coffee Time we began our afternoons together, following the noon meal that we had shared, and a short period of rest.

In our newly renovated house, after our Coffee Time we would go and work for one hour in the garden which today has many flowers, in some part grass and we cultivated also some vegetables, and planted trees. We also organized some cupboards together in order to arrange our library, song book collection, etc., or worked on creating a power point presentation about the religious life, Sion's charism, and ministry at Sion; at other times we simply enjoyed one another and our visitors.

Later on, a second tradition was introduced: making Friday evening a television or video evening, when we not only watched a video but also had chips and coke to add to our common relaxing time. During the Orientation Time, when we were living in the guesthouse, we played cards and various other games rather than watching a video. However, we did

occasionally enjoy a video with the Apostolic Community, though that became a regular feature of our life together when we moved to the Novitiate house where we had a television.

During the Orientation Time Juliana worked a lot on setting up the Novitiate website; (www.nds-novitiate.org) we knew that the Congregation was waiting for news of us, and wanted to know what was going on in the Congregational Novitiate in Jerusalem. Once we had moved to the Novitiate building, the house journal was also introduced in order to record the events and visitors that became part of our daily and weekly life and is building up our chronic!

Monty, what is short for “J in Montana”, is the adorable cat of our community who gave us joy as well as scratches and bites during his childhood and adolescence. He also became a successful hunter for our garden area.

Our fourth tradition began when Sr. Ivone arrived and introduced us to “community dynamics” evenings every two weeks, which became playful times, full of laughter, in which we learned to share something of ourselves through different forms of activities.

By the time the Canonical Year began, instructive presentations, reflective moments and our monthly recollection days, as well as our weekly recollection on Saturday, had become part of our way of life. Another element of our life together was our weekly schedule of housework to keep our home clean and of shopping to maintain our food supplies. Engaging in these activities too contributed to making our home a joy-filled place. Just a few outings, combined with the desire for a real holiday made the summer months of 2014 feel long. While we experienced the Gaza conflict only from a distance, we did have the shock of seeing rockets coming towards Hadassah Hospital, near us, and nearly thought once this one will now fall into our olive grove. This was a startling contrast to our life so close together and enriched by reflective times.

Our courses during the Canonical Year helped us to grow in knowledge of Sion's history and where we experienced the richness of our charism. We realized that Theodore himself grew and was able to articulate in his time what it means to love. In our study of the Constitutions we understood how we live our financial responsibility within the congregation and how religious life is lived, the vows and how the engagement in ministry is articulated.

The book “Spaces of Dialogue”, a Study session with one of our sisters, speaks of how Sion encounters the many faces of Dialogue today and we walked through the liturgical year of the Jewish Feasts in relation to the Christian feasts. Through these encounters we grew in understanding of our charism and the history of the Congregation.

Our human development classes helped us to grow personally and to learn how to live in community. We also had classes in the basic knowledge of Islam, on non violent communication and the history of the particular relationship of the church with the Jewish people - all these were brought to life in our living in Jerusalem.

Our Galilee walk, walking with Jesus in the land was one more meaningful experience for our bonding with one another. Sr. Darlene joined us for this walk with Jesus in the Land.

Our first Christmas together began with backing kilos after kilos of cookies. As in our Community meeting we decided that our Christmas gift for all Jerusalem Communities and workers will be home made Christmas cookies which of course needed to be backed by us first. What a joy we had for two weeks backing Christmas cookies and then make them into lovely gift baskets. Our creation desire did not experience any restrictions.

A basic challenge during the Novitiate time has been the language we struggle to speak, some better than others. This challenge of communication often brought us to the brink of either a loving response or an angry reaction to our constant need to have our letters, website texts, and reflections checked and even corrected over and over again. However, in this limitation, we also learned to find joy and bonding.

We also had an experience travelling around the desert area with Brother Elio, NDS during Holy Week. By visiting significant places in the Bible history and our first Christian heritage we deepened more our understanding of the importance of the desert in our Christian faith.

After returning from our first short-term Apostolic Experience, which we spent in Egypt, Tunis, the Novitiate house, or Ecce Homo, we finally did have our holiday: 4 days in the old Jaffa Youth hostel in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Then, by the beginning of July, it was time to move on again: all the novices went two by two for their long-term Apostolic Experience, in Ecce Homo, Cracow, or the Ein Karem guesthouse.

During the hot summer months we stopped for two weeks and enjoyed our music session with Fr. Werner Hebeisen SJ from Austria. In the second week we shared our learning's in the old folks home in Qubeibe, which in the tradition, is one of the Emmaus remembrance, recalled in the gospel of Luke. Fr. Hebeisen arranged a poem written by a novice about "Nostra Aetate" to the tune of the "Hymnos Akathistos". At the end we gave a multilingual and multicultural concert in the Chapel of Ein Karem for Sisters, Brothers and Guests of Jerusalem.

Now the Novices have been away nearly 6 months and the decisions regarding their Profession of First Vows have been made. Our last two months together will again be full of conferences, recollection days, and finally the celebration of their vows before they say goodbye to one another, no doubt with tears, but also with the gift of the bonding that has happened here in Jerusalem at the Congregational Novitiate. Each of them has come to know very personally but also in relation to each other, the precious meaning of "In Sion Firmata Sum."

Greetings and Blessings

Sr. Juliana
for the Community "St. John in Montana"