

Christmas letter 2015/16  
of the Abbey of Maria Frieden in Kirchsulletten

## **„Vergelt' s Gott" means "God reward you"**

- we would like to spell these words once for the whole period from Advent 2015 to Advent 2016

(This letter was originally written in German language and had a special idea: Each paragraph started with one big letter. All together they resulted to the sentence: Vergelt' s Gott". We are sorry not to be able to transfer this idea into the English version - but of course we wish that God reward you, which ever language you read and speak.)

We would like to join these lines with all the people who are somehow close to us. In the many years since our community was founded here in Kirchsulletten, we have been able to get to know many people. These relationships are different and intense. Many of them are always happy to take part in what is happening here. So now we would like to tell a bit what happened.

It is a narrative, not a perfect report, because a perfect report would not be possible about the abundance of things that we were allowed to experience. So it is going to be a brief summary, which is filled with great gratitude. For beautiful things it is easy to thank. But we are grateful as well for the less beautiful or even hard experiences. It was these what showed us that God has gone all the way with us. He was particularly close to us in the days of illness and release.

The civil year 2016 startet in a calm and serene way. The retreats with two very different monks from the Abbey of St. Ottilien, P. Rupert Hemminger OSB (for German spiritual exercises) and P. Romain Botta OSB (for English spiritual exercises) enriched and deepened our spiritual life. We felt rich in spiritual impulses during these days. As well as the good sermons held by our house spiritual, P. Placidus OSB, and the spiritual impulses of P. Martin Birk OSB and P. Germar OSB in English for our Philippine sisters. A special highlight for our Oblates was a lecture by Father Benedikt Müntenich OSB, the former abbot of Maria Laach. He stayed with us because of the Novitiate meeting in our monastery.

We celebrated birthdays and anniversaries. Mother Gertraud could celebrate her 85th birthday on Sept. 8th. On this very day our H. H. Archbishop also had

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time to celebrate with us and many guests from near and far the jubilees of entrance into the Benedictine Order of our Sister Milagros OSB (70 years) and Sister Carmen OSB (65 years). On December 12th, Sr. Francis Milo OSB celebrated her 80th birthday. These celebrations in our monastic community leave us wondering how diverse and creative the individual fellow-sisters are still in their old age. Very expressive was also the celebration of the name day and 5th anniversary of consecration of our abbess Mother Mechthild OSB on November 11th. Our kitchen team, led by Sr. Bernadette OSB, did provide us with superb meals for every special occasion - and on normal days as well. Our guests are smitten with our healthy products, especially the vegetables that grow in our large vegetable garden. Our Sr. Nieves OSB is still very much committed to this garden.

Honorary helpers have become indispensable to us. There are too many of them for a listing.. Calling them would also be difficult, for there are also some helpers who do not want to be named and others who share the same name. Jacky, who likes to ride the wheel loader and Sister Karola (Oblate), who likes to do everything, lead the dance. Brother Josef (Oblate) and four helpers named Franz are difficult to keep apart. Mrs. Ferstl and Mrs. Helmrich, who supported us with the herb garden. We should also mention Mr. and Mrs. Bäumeler, Dieter, the assistant tutor, Mrs. Bechtle, who does driving services for the sisters and many other things, and many, many people more. On the 2nd Advent we invited them all and as well our staff, so we could show them our gratitude. It was a wonderful day. Too bad that on this day some of them couldn't come due to illness or birthday-parties, Advent- and "Christmas" celebrations. To all who couldn't join us we wish a particularly heartfelt "God reward you"!

We had to let go of our dear Sr. Redempta OSB. On August 12th, after a short illness, at the age of seventy-eight, she went home unexpectedly to the heavenly Father. Her life motto "We have nothing and still have everything!" Became particularly visible during the reflection these days. Her burial was a real resurrection celebration - a festival that is unparalleled. Now we miss her, her faithful prayer and assistants in the vegetable- and utility-kitchen.

We also had to let go of our chickens. The older sisters could not afford this work anymore. The high feed costs and the paid labour force would make this area too costly. Unfortunately, at the end of this year, we have to separate

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ourselves from our cattle after thorough consideration and calculation. EU regulations call for a sewage pit also on the pasture, these regulations, among other things, make us take this serious step.

They also had to let go of some of their health and their powers: Sr. Nieves OSB was in the Klinikum Bamberg for several weeks. Slowly, she is feeling better. Sr. Carmen OSB was also a few weeks in the clinic. Home to us she now needs intensive care and nursing. We are supported here by the Caritas-Sozialstation Hallstadt, by physiotherapists and therapists as well as volunteers.

In the past year, we were faithful to our daily choral prayer. Also the older sisters almost always come to the daily common prayer in our beautiful church. It is good that the e-fix (wheelchair with electric motor) is available for Sr. Lumen and that it is a prerequisite for its experience with tractor driving at her young age. Very helpful is also the invention of the rollator and the automatic door opener. For a number of years, we have been working intensively on the fact that elderly and limited-siblings can take part in all the exercises. This also requires a lot of financial sacrifices (elevator costs - purchase and maintenance).

Often we could hear beautiful sounds and songs in our beautiful church. Everything for the greater honor of God and also as a charity concert for our interests: the concert with the Communis Cantare, the Marienandacht in October with the Wimmelbach Church Choir, the charity concert on Christkönig Sunday with Sr. Felizitas and Japanese artists, the monthly hours of worship, The listeners always have a little taste of what we once expect.

We had guests all year round. Individuals and groups, pilgrims (Jakobuspilger, bicycle pilots, nightwatchers) for an overnight stay, a weekend and also a few days came from different places, indeed different countries to us. "One learns so different life stories, which is extremely interesting!", Once said an intern, who spent a longer time with us. Here we would like to meet the invitation of St. Benedict to meet Christ in the guest. In the coming year, we are already well-stocked, also with retreats for young people, which makes us particularly happy. To give on faith and to help pre-live against the de-Christianization of our country and also to inspire more young people to priestly and religious life. We felt very much confirmed that the decision to renovate our guesthouse H. Edeltraud was a very good one.

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Oftentimes, we were again on the road this year: to celebrate jubilees and celebrations in other monasteries (like Münsterschwarzach), Sister Felizitas OSB on home leave in Japan, Sister Christine OSB in Heimaturlaub, at abbots-, abbess- and novices-meetings. The Philippines, the airports in Nuremberg and Munich, when Sr. Hildelita OSB and Sr. Mary-Hedwig OSB were back home after a longer period of work and exchange, and Sister Agnes OSB and Sister Trinitas OSB came to us.

We are sad and depressed about the situation of so many people on our planet in war and catastrophe areas. With our prayer we accompanied the many refugees and their helpers, as well as the people who still live in these countries. We were able to pass on clothes and food donations. We were able to provide very concrete assistance in special emergency situations when we granted church asylum several times. We did this for refugees from Iraq, Iran, Syria and Ukraine. It was particularly impressive for us and our Sunday worship community, when Anush was accepted into the Catholic Church on 10.07.2016 at the end of her church asylum. We were very pleased when a larger group of Muslims came to us for a week to prepare for the baptism. Meanwhile, a larger group of them has already been baptized. Some Muslims also visit our worship hours. To live day after day as a Benedictine woman is a great challenge. But we are happy to master it. We sincerely hope that very soon young women will get involved with this life with us. Please take this request into your prayers. The circle of our oblates has multiplied to our delight: two women placed their oblation on the first Sunday of Advent: Sr. Karola and Sr. Salome.

Day after day, we also gladly take your concerns into our daily prayer.

May you be able to experience the blessing of God day by day.

This we wish and ask for you!

Your grateful sisters of the Abbey of Maria Frieden in Kirchsulletten

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