

Memories from Nicole Bijl (Past Pupil and Co Worker -Belgium)

I was a student in the secondary school (college: humaniora) in the institute of Dames van Maria in Aalst (Belgium- Flanders) from 1956 till 1962.

Mere Henriette was the superior at that time and Mere Pia, the headmistress. Mere Antoinette was our teacher of French in 1961. She was very modern and dynamic. The year after she became director in DVM htb on the other side of the street but our class kept contact with her. Up until now some classmates and myself meet with Sr. Antoinette each year.

Later on, when I had the opportunity to read the constitutions and the exhortations of Canon Van Crombrughe, I understood that they had been applied by the Ladies of Mary (Dames van Maria in our Flemish language) and that this made us happy as youngsters during our studies in the school- DVM in Aalst- humaniora.

We felt a positive approach to education- a sense of freedom of mind and spirit. When I meet others from that time who were educated by other congregations, it seems to me that they had a more negative and 'blame-centred' education.

Even during the holidays, we went together with Sr. Antoinette, Sr. Marie Alberte and Sr. Lamberta on a camping trip in the neighbourhood of Brugge.

Later on, when I became a teacher I started in the school of DVM htb where Sr. Antoinette was the director. We as a staff, were really involved in the running of the school. We explored together how to base our educational project on the Gospel of Jesus Christ who was the inspiration for our role as educators. For me it was a demanding but a fulfilling life project which continues up to today. When Sr Antoinette left the school I myself became the deputy headmistress and we continued in the same spirit first with Lydie Penne-De Visscher and later with Hilde Verniers (Van Cauwenberghe). Now it is with Kristine Impens and Kristof De Coninck who are continuing in the same spirit and with an enthusiastic team.

During the period working with Sr. Antoinette we had to work hard but we also had a lot of fun and a deep feeling of joy and confidence in the Lord. That

energized us. Nowadays I am still in the Board of Governors and I try with others to stress the importance of Gospel values.

Every year we organise a meeting on this subject with all the directors of ECOV (because DVM htb belongs to this umbrella organisation). Now the diversity and inter-religious dialogue is a very important topic.

Yes, I can say that the spirit of Chanoine Van Crombrugghe and the Congregation Dames van Maria is still an inspiration for the educational project in Aalst.

And still now, Sr. Antoinette and Sr. Emma (who was a teacher in the primary school of DVM htb) are giving a testimony of joy, inspired by the image of a loving God.

This is a memory from a grateful former student and co-worker of the Dames v Maria in Aalst.

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