

Tilburg, 1 September 2020

Dear Carol,

What was I pleasantly surprised to receive your congratulations on my 60th anniversary as a religious brother in the international Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, the Brothers CMM. I am deeply honoured with such an unexpected outpouring of felicitations by you, as well as many others of the Santa Clara High School Family. It is an awesome expression of your gratitude for the 35 years of my adult life that I was privileged to be an educator of your children at Santa Clara High School, in response to the request in 1963 by James Francis Cardinal McIntyre from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, to teach in Catholic education in Oxnard, Southern California.

In the evening of August 28, 2020, after a special Vespers prayer service in the chapel of the residence care facility Joannes Zwijsen, 30 Brothers CMM and 8 associate members CMM came together to celebrate the 25, 60, 65 and 70 anniversaries in religious life of 10 brothers. I was one of them. Brother John H. Grever (history teacher at Santa Clara High School from 1965-1967, and presently the bursar general of the Brothers CMM) was the first speaker of the evening and announced that you, Joe and Betty and my former students and parents of students, had gotten together in order to surprise me with a gift. It turned out to be an enormous gift of \$ 3,210. The enclosed dedication read:

*Dear Br. Edward Gresnigt CMM:
With gratitude to God on this joyous occasion of your 60-year Jubilee
as a CMM Brother,
it is our pleasure to send you this gift
and message of congratulations and best wishes!
Your many years as a teacher at Santa Clara High School in Oxnard, California
are fondly remembered by many.
May the years ahead be filled with God's Blessings, peace and good health!*

At such a distance my question is, how can I thank you personally for your good wishes, cards and even for your impressive monetary gift? Certainly, first by letting you know that I am extremely grateful to our loving God for having called me to the religious life and I will definitely and gratefully remember you in the weeks and months ahead in my prayers. Over the last 60 years I have had the opportunity to become a happy and grateful person and have positively responded to a variety of requests of my religious superiors for a ministry in teaching and for responsibilities of leadership within the Congregation. And secondly, perhaps also, by saying something about where my personal journey in life has taken me and the way in which I, focussing now specifically on my time at Santa Clara, have consciously tried to be a role model for my students, because most of you have only known me for the duration of one or several Religion and/or Social Studies classes.

But before I do that, I would like to let you know that I have spoken with Brother Lawrence Obiko, the 14th Superior General of the Congregation, and asked him, this

because of my vow of community of goods, that I would like to use your gift to purchase for myself a good pair of walking shoes and socks and donate the remainder to the vocation and formation activities of our brothers CMM in Sigona, Kenya, where, after my years at Santa Clara in 2002, I had hoped to serve, but as you know turned out differently.

One of the treasured possessions I took along when leaving the United States in 2002, is a series of Santa Clara High School yearbooks, that from ‘times immemorial’ were graciously and affectionately created year after year by you Joe and Betty Kennedy. Your professional and friendly service to the Santa Clara Family has been for countless generations of Santa Clara High School students and their families a greatly appreciated gift. On many occasions I have, with a certain sense of nostalgia, but always with a grateful smile, perused these masterfully and well-designed memory books, to refresh my memory.

During the evening celebration of my feast in Tilburg, I learned from Brother Grever that you Joe and Betty Kennedy were spearheading this wonderful initiative. Grateful for the many SCHS yearbooks on my bookshelves here and especially appreciative for your gracious presence (and that of your children) at Santa Clara, I was truly overwhelmed that evening when the message of congratulations sounded in the large dining room of Joannes Zwijsen. I thank you and all contributors for expressing your gratitude and your good wishes for God’s blessings, peace and good health!

Just a week before my 60th anniversary I turned 78. I can honestly say that in looking back on my life, I am extremely grateful to God for the excellent DNA, for the upbringing by my parents and the life-long education and formation by the Brothers CMM, as well as for the opportunities of service at Santa Clara High School and within the Congregation.

Realizing as I said that most of you have known me only for a short time of my life, it is perhaps appropriate at this time to share with you a little of my larger history and life’s journey than many of you have known when you were a student in my class or a parent of a son who entrusted your son or daughter to the dedicated teachers and staff of Santa Clara. For that reason, I would like to share a 2014 interview ‘*Encounter with...*’, written for the brothers in the Netherlands and Belgium, by Christianne van de Wal, an associate member of the Congregation of the Brothers CMM. In my translation I freely added here and there quite some details, so that you would recognize even more certain developments of my life that might have intersected with yours. I share this with you purely from a deep sense of gratitude for the blessed gift from God that you personally and the entire Santa Clara community have been for me for those 35 years and beyond.

In the series ‘Encounters with’ you can read about people who have a close connection with the community of the elderly brothers at ‘Joannes Zwijsen’. This is the community of the Brothers of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy (Brothers CMM) at the residential care facility in Tilburg, the Netherlands. This time you will get acquainted with the life and work of a brother who was a Deputy Superior General of the former General Board for 12 years, Brother Edward Gresnigt.

As Coenraad Willem, named after his grandfather on his mother’s side, Brother Edward was born in the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands, on August 21, 1942 as the son of

Herman Gresnigt (*1913) and Anna Harbord (*1910). He was second in the family after his brother Herman, and three sisters Anneke, Marga and Petra followed him. Father Gresnigt was a truckdriver by profession for a dairy factory. For many years he collected milk from farmers around Utrecht; milk that was waiting in large milk cans at the farms around Utrecht. Edward could come along when he was around the age of 11 and was impressed by the tough task of lifting those milk cans. His father's strong hands were full of calluses and crevices, especially in winter. During the Second World War, his father also collected the milk in other parts of the country and sometimes let people ride along who somehow had to be elsewhere.

Edward's mother was a kindergarten teacher and practiced that profession until she married at the age of 29. Edward's brother and sisters still live near Utrecht. (On December 14, 2019, my youngest sister Petra Swanink-Gresnigt died.)

As so often happened with religious brothers who were in places outside the Netherlands, Edward was not present at the funeral of both of his parents. His father already said goodbye to Edward before he left for California for the first time in 1965, because he was afraid that he would die in that period, which lasted four years before he saw him again. He would say goodbye to Edward in this way many times, each time he left for America after his leave, but it was only in 1993 that he died. Mother followed almost 3 years later.

In his early years Edward went to St. Gerardus Majella Primary School in Utrecht, of which 5 of the 6 teachers were religious brothers CMM. In the first grade he was with Brother Edmundus van de Boom, who also conducted the choir 'De kanariepietjes' (Little Canaries), of which Edward was a member. Edmundus made a great impression on him. In his last class at primary school Brother Nicasio Verest asked him what he wanted to become later in life; his answer was: 'a religious brother, just like you.'

Edward went to secondary school in Goirle, followed by St. Stanislaus Teacher Training College in Tilburg. In 1963 he earned his Dutch Teacher Certificate and in 1964 his Headmaster's Certificate. Meanwhile he worked as a teacher in the first grade of Cardinal De Jong School in The Hague. He enjoyed that inquisitive first class very much, but already in the same year Brother Novatus Vinckx, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Brothers CMM at that time, asked him to go to California. He remembers all too well when that phone call came on 15 February 1965, his mother's birthday, and the reaction of his parents when he told them the news in person that very same day: two big tears on his mother's face are still engraved in his memory. But his parents gave their permission.

Of the 65 boys with whom Edward, at the age of 12 went to Goirle, the 33 who entered the novitiate with him at the age of 18, and the 11 who made the religious profession for life with him in 1966, 5 are still alive: the Brothers Ad Hems (who worked in Indonesia), Henrique Matos (who still is in Brazil), Kees Mateijnsen (the Netherlands), Ben Maijvis (who also worked in Indonesia) and Edward himself. A salient detail is that there were brothers in California who left the Congregation, but with whom Edward still has a good contact, and some of whom, at his request, are taking care of the translation for the English-language *Magazine Brothers CMM*.

The brother house, first on 159 Second and D Street Oxnard, California, where Edward went, already existed for two years when he arrived there on August 7, 1965. In 1970 the

brothers moved to 2336 So. C Street. He would live and work in Oxnard for 37 years. Edward began his studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and studied History and German.

When in 1967 he received his bachelor's degree in History, he was appointed as a teacher at Santa Clara High School, to which he remained attached for no less than 35 years. In the years following his appointment he continued his studies at Loyola Marymount in the evenings, weekends and summers. At that time it happened frequently that after teaching all day in Oxnard, he drove to Los Angeles for an hour and a half, took part in the meal and Vespers prayer service in the community of brothers CMM who lived there, then attended the three-hour classes and late in the evening he drove the Pacific Coast Highway home to Oxnard. His favorite stop on the way back was at McDonalds for a milkshake to stay awake during the ride back along the 1, the Pacific Coast Highway. The results were a master's degree in History and a California Teacher Credential.

In the meantime, he also served as novice-master for a few years and since 1980 he was the local superior of the brothers in Oxnard for no less than 21 years and for 12 years the regional superior of the two communities of Brothers CMM in California.

But it is especially the years at Santa Clara High School that Edward can tell interesting stories about. At Santa Clara High School he taught History and Religion to students between the ages of 14 and 18. He enjoyed teaching and used numerous wall pictures, art pictures and drawings to illustrate his lessons. In his present room at the Generalate hangs a reproduction of 'Spring', by the Dutch artist Alma Tadema, given by his students upon leaving the museum. The original painting hangs in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, to which he drew students' attention. As moderator he enjoyed organizing annual outings with students who belonged to the National Honor Society or the California Scholarship Federation, in which some educational and recreational elements had to be present. To paintings like those of Dutch artists, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Alma Tadema and many other educational and recreational sites, he gladly took his enthusiastic students.

At Santa Clara High School, where Edward taught, he worked together with eight principals. In reverence and gratitude for their service to Santa Clara High School I mention here, also to refresh your memory, their names: Msgr. Joseph Pekarcik, Msgr. John Cosgrove, Msgr. Louis Gutierrez, Br. Louis de Visser, Br. Hilarion O'Conner, Sr. Anne Eugene Metcalf, Mr. Keith Murphy, Mr. Martin Young. Without wanting to diminish the accomplishments and contributions of the other seven principals, Edward indicates that Brother Louis de Visser was the best. Louis maintained very good contact with parents, emphasized the importance of Santa Clara High School's Catholic identity and had a good relationship with the teachers and students.

As a result of his study of Catholic social doctrine, also known at the time as "the best kept secret of the Catholic Church", Edward successfully presented to him the idea of a Christian Service Class, in which he brought juniors and seniors into contact for a period of internship with the sick, the elderly, the physically and mentally handicapped, and so on. He taught about them the Catholic vision on these peripheral groups, had his students report on their experiences in class, visited the places where they stayed for short periods of time and accompanied them with their activities. In doing so, he fostered social engagement among the young people, who in this way were given the opportunity to immerse themselves in dealing with all kinds of people in need of help. Edward made

them read the book by Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something beautiful for God*, about Mother Teresa, as an excellent example of Christian service and a way of looking beyond ‘just doing good’, because as Pope Francis on 23 August 2020 said: “Christian charity is not simple philanthropy but, on the one hand, it is looking at others through the eyes of Jesus Himself and, on the other hand, seeing Jesus in the face of the poor.”

Edward doesn’t call himself a good student, but he loved to study long hours and he worked hard, especially on the timely correction of his students’ homework. At Santa Clara he took on several responsibilities. For 18 years he was the chairman of the social studies department and for 12 years in charge of the religion department; on top of that he dedicated himself to Christian social service projects. One of them was organizing recreational, educational and health activities for poor children in Tijuana, Mexico, just across the border near San Diego. From 1978 to 1983, together with Brother Louis de Visser and about 15 students each time, he went on 18 weekend trips to be with children who lived from and on rubbish dumps, in order to give them a nice day, the so-called “Los Niños Trips”. When his students were on the garbage dump in Tijuana, Edward as an educator, pointed towards the brilliant San Diego skyline, making them aware of the enormous contrasts between those two cities, only ten miles apart and in the evenings, they shared their impressions, experiences and reflections. At the border there were also regular commemorations and prayer services for the migrants and refugees who tried to make the transition from Mexico and Latin America to California, but many of them died in the desert. Edward and his students participated in these prayerful commemorations several times.

Attention was also paid to individual care, among students, but also for example to a certain ‘Alice’, an elderly woman who was badly injured after a collision in front of the brother house in Oxnard. She was physically and mentally wounded and Edward assisted her for many years to put her broken life on track. Countless large and small needs in his environment came his way and his commitment to help those who needed it was always there, in so far as he had the time and possibilities to do so.

In February 2002, the brother house in Oxnard was closed and he moved with the last two brothers, the Brothers William Verheijen and Geoffrey Kanen to Tilburg. Brother Andrew Spijkers had died just two years before, in 2000 and Brother Michael van Abeelen already in 1983.

During the General Chapter, a meeting to elect a new leadership board for the Congregation of the Brothers CMM, Edward was asked to assist in the office of the secretary. It was six months before that gathering, during an exploratory trip to Kenya, where he wanted, then at the age of 60, to serve after his years in California, that he was asked by the novice-master there, Brother Lawrence Obiko, to come and support him at the novitiate in the brother house in Sigona. But things turned out differently.

On March 28, 2002, Edward was unexpectedly elected to the General Board as its Deputy Superior General. With great dedication and gratitude, he fulfilled this function for two six-year terms, in close cooperation with the Superior General Brother Broer Huitema, until June 2014, when an entirely new General Board was elected. What had been half-and-half agreed upon: to go to Sigona, a room and an office next to the one of Brother Lawrence in Kenya, was reversed in 2008, when Brother Lawrence came to Tilburg in his capacity as a new member of the General Board and took a room next to

Edward. And, in 2014, Brother Lawrence Obiko was elected Superior General and Edward now has been able to assist him ever since; not now in Sigona, but in Tilburg. Till this day Brother Edward has been supporting the members of the General Board in myriads of ways.

Looking back, a lot of beautiful things have come his way. There have certainly been difficult moments, for example when conflicts that had to be resolved, but the many positive and unexpected experiences dominate. Being a religious brother at an excellent Catholic school, the fascinating contact with young people, the supporting work in the General Board are all pearls in his life. He now hopes to get more time for reading historical thrillers and other reading when he is in order in his new room in the Generalate (on one of the residential squares). Also reading articles and books six evenings a week to the elderly Brothers Rob Swinkels and Jan Verheijen (a brother of Brother William Verheijen) at the residential care facility Joannes Zwijzen has become for them a welcome activity of brotherhood.

In closing you would agree with me that because of COVID-19 the last half year has not been easy for most people. I hope that you and your family have been spared this horrendous illness. For me personally it has not been easy, because just before that time, in December 2019, my youngest sister Petra died on account of respiratory problems. This was shortly after the death of Brother Jan Koppens, the Provincial Superior of the brothers in the Netherlands, at whose sacrament of the sick and his passing away I was present. I was also present at the deaths of other two fellow brothers who died in the hospital because of COVID-19. One of them visited Oxnard a couple of times. He was the 12th Superior General, Brother Harrie van Geene. And as a fellow brother you do not want them to die alone. In our community a total of five fellow brothers have been infected with the virus and four others died. Presently the situation in the Netherlands is pretty much under control and hopefully no second wave will engulf us. I hope and certainly will pray that this devastating disease will remain far from you and from those you love.

It must be clear to you that the expression “out of sight, out of mind”, does not apply to you, and neither does it to me. For both of us counts that we may be out of each other’s sight, but not out of each other’s hearts. And for that I am grateful to God and to you!

Let us keep the entire Santa Clara High School Family, and all those who supported, attended and taught there, in our prayer. And here I think with great piety of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, the great teaching staff and support personnel and my fellow brothers: Emeric Goossens †, Louis de Visser †, Anthony Smulders †, Peter Huybers, Frederic (John H.) Grever, William Verheijen †, Michael van Abeelen †, Frans van den Bruggen †, Frans de Kort, Richard van Rooij †, Michael McGee.

Sincerely,
Your brother

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