

Our life at Anta Akhi

Serving a life of dignity for people with disability



April 2015

"Jesus has risen ! He is really risen !"



In this Easter period, I wish we could rediscover the marvel of Resurrection so that it could enlighten our own life, own joy and own peace. The Christmas message is about joy and peace. Before crucifixion, joy and peace : "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." and "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

After Easter : joy and peace. That's what I can see when I read the Word of The Lord.

Jesus has come to achieve His Father's plan for me and for each human being, since the devastating consequences of the first man's sin . Jesus has come to patch and mend it, and he'll do so until the last man. God's plan is already being implemented. It's granted to us.

Jesus' Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Holy Mary assume their responsibilities. What about me? Do I want to do the Will of Jesus?

God doesn't act without me taking part in His plan; I have to be aware of the marvels which God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) has done for me, within me, and for everyone. I have to be aware of what He wants me to be, so that His joy may be within me. He wants His Love to restore health to me and to give me joy and an unshakeable peace .

What is my role? What can I do to let what God gave me, stay and act in me? I have everything within my reach. It's possible. It has already been achieved. **Easter is a stage, the center of my life. If I want it, it happens . Do you wish it ? Let it be to you according to your faith.**

Yvonne Chami
Founding president

Jesus, Son of the living God, source of love and gift, forever present in our own lives.

We often hear these words, is it true or just a story ? He came into the world, he died and rose; is it a tale told to children from age to age? Why did God send his only Son to the earth? Why did He let Him be crucified and die to rise from the dead at the end? Why did the Almighty God, the King of kings, choose to suffer and allow His Son to endure pain?

Couldn't he change the world, through a single look, without suffering ?

Many questions come to my mind from time to time, especially when I think about the absolute Love incarnated amongst us, Love who has gone as far as Calvary, carrying the cross, the cross of humiliation. Every time I think about that or when I look at the cross, pain, suffering and abasement come to my mind but when I look at Jesus on the cross, my vision becomes different. I only see love and gift and he tells me: "I'm here for you and I love you. With me, your sorrow has been turned into joy, your pain has been cured, your anger has been changed into peace, your hate into forgiveness, your pride into humility, your selfishness into sharing, death leads to resurrection."

Jesus, I thank you for being so patient with me ! Thank you for always forgiving my doubts and weaknesses; thank you for giving me a brighter and brighter look as my limits and my

ignorance made me think that my crosses and sufferings were inflicted by you !

You make me realize that you are the absolute Love and that it is impossible for you to send me the cross; you are present and alive, helping me to carry my cross, carrying my cross for me !

Jesus, I thank you because you help me overcome my weaknesses and say yes ! I want to be like you ! I want to overcome my problems because you are with me ! I want to love you through each person that I meet. I want to be a true witness of your infinite love coming from the resurrection.

Christ is alive ! He really is !

Roula Najm
Executive director



Holy journey towards Easter ! *Fadi relates...*

He is 41, he is deaf and blind; he is in a wheelchair, but he is happy... Happy ? You may wonder how it is possible to be happy under these conditions. For Fadi, the answer is clear: **Without God, it would have been impossible".**

During Lent, he started to work on himself to keep on witnessing the peaceful and thankful joy he feels. He shared his own experience with us:

"During Lent, I try hard to see what I could do better, personally: I try not to lose my temper but to consider the problem well defined, and even to turn it into a source of joy... even if I sometimes fail !

When meditating on God's Word, I find it interesting to give without sounding trumpet. I prefer to offer my prayers and my gift to people who can't return the favor. Thus it takes on its full meaning. I also try to fast secretly going unnoticed, to experience the fast of the heart : **when I share my testimony with schoolchildren, I try to be faithful and true about my life, considering that I'm not better than anyone else: "Look at me ! I have a disability, but I'm happy !". This is not the message I wish to pass on them. It's rather: "God is everywhere present. I realize what God has given to me. Even if he doesn't heal me, I want to proclaim His Love, even if I get tired and I have to fight.**

"What is my motto in life? I want to stop feeling sorry for myself, so as to avoid scaring people away. At the heart of any difficulty, which I keep to myself, I think: **"God is present ! Without Him, we are not able to carry our sufferings. God still gives us life today.**

"For me, Holy week remains the major event : I contemplate the sufferings Our Lord went through and I look at mines... They are minor in comparison to his. So I place them into His hands and He comforts me. Without Him, I would never have experienced such a peace .I find great consolation in the fact that my sufferings are worth being endured with our God. I rejoice and feel comforted by this belief."



When love is given

A first for Madonna !

Madonna gave Sabine, a twelve grade student, a big hug when she found out her cousin was affected by Down syndrome too and realized she hadn't seen her for a long time because she lives in Canada. Sabine was very moved and she cried : When Madonna kissed me, I think it was the most beautiful moment in my life. I cried, I wonder why, I had nothing to say, I simply cried". Then, Madonna was moved in turn: it was lunch time, she invited Sabine to sit down, took a plate, ladled soup into it, added some bread, cut vegetables... as if it was her own meal ! It was amazing to see Madonna doing so, preparing and serving food to Sabine...

Philippe has achieved a dream...

Among the love initiatives led by a small team of Anta Akhi, it was Philippe's turn to do something he liked. He told Rita:"Since my childhood, I have dreamt about going to this restaurant. My wish has been granted ! I felt much tenderness. I had a lot of fun ! Last night, I woke up several times , thinking back about the evening ! I wonder how I could return the favor !". Rita replied : "By keeping confident in our true love for you !"

Joseph, a devoted, faithful and humble man.

He doesn't realize all the good he does to everyone : to Ghassan, when he finds a comfortable position for his hand; to Gharib, when he feeds him; to Fadi, who is hard-of-hearing, when he prays the Rosary at his side, using sign language as best as he can... As far as young ones are concerned, he is never short of of examples. With the staff too, especially with Geneviève whom he pays particular attention to.

Every day he comes to pay her a visit, offering his help to make some copies or deliver the mail and, above all, praying with her. Joseph is a real "breath of fresh air" in Geneviève's daily life. She is particularly moved by his loyalty and attention : With Joseph by her side, she definitely won't forget to take her medicine !

Children's presents which make a difference:

Little Iyad's dad wanted his son to experience the joy of sharing. On his 5th birthday, Iyad agreed not to receive any present from his parents; he turned it into a gift to the people in need. Thus, his dad provided us with 1,800\$... 300\$ were given by friends'parents who, deeply moved by Iyad's action, wanted to take part.

On her 10th birthday, during Lent, Cléa told her mother : "Well, Mom, I don't want any birthday present; there are many poor people in the world and I want to help these people in need as best as I can." Thus, all the guests were asked to turn their usual present into a modest contribution. The money collected was divided among two charities and Anta Akhi is going to receive 400\$.



Thank you to all small ones and older ones who keep us going with their love and their kindness !

A new adventure begins... in Togo

written by Elisabeth Chaumont

Since 2013, Anta Akhi has been linked with the diocese of Atakpamé in Togo. This partnership started with a meeting with Bishop Nicodème Barrigah, where Yvonne read the topic of the HVE seminar. "The Church, as a Mother and educator, is necessarily responsible for the part it plays in the growth of all God's children who have a disability, through all stages of life". This title questioned Bishop Barrigah who wished to benefit from Anta Akhi's experience in his diocese. From January 9th to 22nd 2015, a small team (Yvonne, Chantal and Elisabeth) had the opportunity to spend some time there in order to confirm and think about this partnership: **what are we trying to build together?** What part do we play in this cooperation? During our stay, we particularly felt the presence of Mary and the Holy Spirit in the progress of our collaboration. This new project starts with the establishment of a diocesan secretariat and the launching of "laboratory" parishes. **It's entirely in keeping with the initial project Anta Akhi/HVE**, a project made by and for the Church.: Especially as far as parish life is concerned, we should take into consideration the growth of all God's children, especially those with self-care limits due to their disabilities.



Bishop Barrigah and the priests in his team wished that we could meet all relevant actors (some clergy members, groups of lay people...) and visit parishes and seminaries. At every meeting, Yvonne encouraged us **to change the way we look at other people, in order to become aware of the fact that everyone is worth and important in the heart and eyes of Jesus alive, His Father and His Mother.**

When I look at others, I tend to take physical appearance into account but I should look at every human being as Jesus does with his children, no matter how they may be or look. Let's see how God did marvels in each of us. Jesus alive is mainly concerned about those whom He has spent a lot of time with, people injured in their hearts, marginalized and excluded ones. Disability is not a problem.

The problem comes from the major part of healthy people, who are God's children in their parishes, and who exclude, marginalize and refuse to live with people whom they consider as being without any importance.

Pastors, leaders of lay movements, parishioners should change the way they look at those disabled people who are God's children, so that they can live among us, as we do, in parishes and within the Church. It is essential to start by changing the way we look at others, and to consider other people as being equal to me in worth and greatness.. If I do believe that you are my brother, I will care about you and find, in my loving heart, what you need to grow up. Thus, "life is beautiful with you, my brother".

Great volunteers !

They had been our youths' careers for years and then, pursue their professional career elsewhere. Paul, Alain, Jacques, Fadi, Elie, Walid, Jessica, Bachir (with Layal and Rita) have stayed friends. They chose to spend a weekend volunteering their time to taking of our youths, sharing their life, having fun, singing, dancing and recharging their batteries !

They had been waiting for this weekend, they dreamt about it... Reality exceeded their expectations ! Youths and careers relate...

Our youths were more than happy !! Joey kept giving "habibis" to all the friends, especially to Paul and Alain... Madonna shared coffee bags with everyone ! Ghassan was smiling so much that his mouth hurt ! Samo was giving hugs to everyone. She went back to her old habits waking Fadi up. There are no words to describe how Eli K felt; he has such a big smile on his face ! Tony really enjoyed to meet his "brothers", especially Jacques ! Barbara appreciated D.J. Paul's music and enjoyed singing Anta Akhi hymn with bodily gestures. Carole and Ghassan felt pampered ! Pierre regretted that his brother was back home on this weekend; he would have appreciated !

Those sentiments were shared by the former careers: they felt like at home, with their own family. They were part of a unified team. z"We were doing everything we could, including logistical tasks, having a lot fun. We were so glad to please the youths, without a determined program: there were song, dances, delicious meals..." According to Paul, love and joy we experienced on this weekend are lacking in our world !

Layal, free from her usual work, took her time to be with the youths, look after them, to share their life, with joy !



Walid realize it was one of the most beautiful times he had at Anta Akhi, in a family atmosphere. He looked back with nostalgia to the time when Yvonne taught them, every Sunday, before mass.

Rita, so happy, wished to spend another time, right after it, in the middle of the week. Jacques said, joyfully: "we had such a need for recharging our batteries !"

Dear all, thank you so much for your kindness and your love. Life is beautiful with you !

*Feeling like becoming a life companion ? Feeling like trying a life experience? Join us!
With our youngsters, it is a mark to grow happy in your life!*

Fadia : "Anta Akhi really is my family"

Fadia, 25th years old psychology student, volunteer for almost 12 years in Anta Akhi, carer for 2 years, shines. Her discreet and cheerful presence doesn't go unnoticed at Anta Akhi; she is trying to find her path, personally and professionally... As of now, she has chosen to live as a part of Anta Akhi family...

I had always wanted to write a few words to describe how I feel about Anta Akhi, my family. I've known the "chabibeh", young people with disabilities for a long time, for about 12 years. Sometimes, I came to Anta Akhi and committed for a while. At other times, I was just dealing with my own life. This close connection with the youths made me realize how pleased I am to share their life.

When I talk to Barbara about my family, to Carole about my studies, when Samo gives me a hug... I find the strength to live in

the right way.

Sharing life with the "chabibeh"

and the whole team of Anta Akhi, including the carers, has always supported me and brought back my missing smile. I will always be grateful to Yvonne and Bishop Guy for having brought us together.



Every day is a party at Anta Akhi... almost every day...

Anta Akhi family gathers **with great joy**. All of us (youths, staff, parents, friends, sponsors, donors) celebrate the feasts we take to heart:

Special mass for children on the feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, **mass for newlyweds** on the first Sunday of Lent, celebration of **Saint Joseph's day**, on March 19th. and **Mother's day** on March 21st.

Not forgetting, above all, the anniversary of the launching of the project. Our adventure started on March 25th 1976, on Ascension Day... Each year, Yvonne joins us on this special day, to thank God for the great marvels he has done for us, with Mary Set El Beit, Queen of the Impossible, in our family everyday-life because she is our loving Mother, taking care of everyone.

On these occasions, we have the opportunity to meet with families, to give thanks to God and go on our way with passion, confidence, joy, hope, keeping faithful to God's Love.

Call

Dear friends, our call this month is about a patient-lift, that is indispensable for our youngsters security and for the prevention of backaches at the level of our life companions. The cost of the patient-lift with headrest and 3 slings amounts to 3157\$.

Moreover, for the safety of our youngsters during the bath, 2 rotary shower seats, and a shower chair with backrest are needed.

The amount needed is \$ 215 USD.

How to help AntaAkhi

1. Sponsor a young person from \$ 10 (or € 10) per month, \$ 120 (or € 120) per year.
2. Make a single donation possibly specifying the need that you want to support.

To make a tax exempt donation in the US, please contact sesobelusa@gmail.com

Thank you for being part of what we build together in our journey of life.

If you wish to receive our newsletter by email, please notify us on communication@antaakhi.org

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