

## **A glimpse into contemplative life: Sr. Elisabeth on the Carmel in Sweden.**

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-11/sisters-project-152-contemplative-life-sweden-elisabeth-carmel.html>

In Sweden, where Catholics make up less than two percent of the population and contemplative orders are underrepresented, Sister Elisabeth from the Carmelite monastery of Glumslöv offers an extraordinary look at a way of life that is almost completely unknown in Scandinavia.

By Mario Galgano – Glumslöv, Sweden

Sr. Elisabeth, originally from the island of Rügen and raised in a Catholic family in eastern Germany, described her path to the Carmel as a search for her vocation.

The Catholic Church was not strongly present in her home region, so she decided to study theology in Bavaria. There, during her studies and as she sought God's will, she realized she wanted to join the Carmelites. Her parish priest reminded her of earlier youth trips she had made to Sweden, during which she had already visited this convent. She then arrived at her decision "quite quickly."

She had always been drawn to contemplative prayer, and she wrote her thesis on interior prayer according to St. Teresa of Avila. Her initial concern was whether or not the cloistered life would be compatible with her temperament—she grew up with many siblings—but a month in Assisi quelled that fear. In Assisi, she felt she no longer wanted to go back outside. "I want to stay inside," she realized, and the cloister was not "a problem" for her.

There are currently 13 nuns living in the Carmel in Glumslöv. Their primary task is contemplative prayer—the pursuit of union with God. The community believes this union "has consequences for the world," in the form of "strength" or a "healing answer," and doing penance for the sins of the world.

"Many people have forgotten God; many people have forgotten Jesus, and we are simply trying to give him what we can—and perhaps even more than what would be expected," affirmed Sister Elisabeth.

Daily life in the monastery also includes practical tasks like cooking and making clothing, but all of these exist in service to prayer, which always comes first.

According to Sr. Elisabeth, the monastery attracts young people. She attributed this to the sisters' effort to live "as closely as possible" to the original constitutions of Saint Teresa of Avila.

She feels this aspect was a decisive reason for choosing this particular Carmelite monastery, because she saw put into practice the very concrete way of life she had studied in Teresa's writings.

Contact with the outside world is regulated for Carmelite nuns. Normal contact with parents, family, and friends is possible but limited. Family visits are restricted to seven days per year, and communication takes place primarily through letters—though rising postage costs make this more difficult. News from the world reaches the nuns mainly through the Mother Superior, but also through friends and family visits. They get the "bigger picture," not necessarily all the details.

Relations with neighbours vary; some are friendly, while others react negatively—for example, to the sound of the bells. There is also "aggression against faith" or "Christianity in general."

Today, religious sisters in Sweden are seen as "rather exotic." Sr. Elisabeth estimated the total number of religious sisters in Sweden at around 100 to 111, compared with about nine million inhabitants. There are also a few Protestant communities, but often with only two or three sisters.

Asked about the most beautiful and most difficult aspects of monastery life, Sr. Elisabeth replied, "The most beautiful is Jesus."

Union with God, she said, is the best thing there is. The most difficult aspect for her personally is community life, which she attributes to her own temperament.