

## REFLECTION



# Let's stay connected

**Elisabeth Öhlböck** reflects on the importance of connecting with one another and what this entails in daily life.

**M**obile phones are a great tool for staying connected. My 5-year-old niece Karolina has now mastered the skill of continuing a voice-call-conversation for any length of time, without needing to see the person on the other end on a video-screen. Last Sunday, I chatted to her mum while the family were at the playground. After a while, Karolina wanted to talk to me and asked: 'Would you like to go down the slide with me?' No need to mention that I was more than willing to go down a slide with her! I heard how she was steadying herself by clasping the mobile phone tightly in her small hand, saying: 'I carry you up now, ok? Are you ready?' 'Ready', I replied and after a whooping sound from her end of the phone, she exclaimed: 'Done!' and asked me whether I had the courage to move on from this rather small slide to a 'medium-sized slide'. I did have the courage and felt the same delight as she did, at sliding down the 'medium-sized slide', even though I was really only sitting on a sofa, 2148 km away from her.

This experience made me once again realize that joy and meaning in life don't necessarily come from a correct assessment of a situation, such as me not actually having gone down a slide in Austria but sitting in a living room in Ireland. Joy and meaning, in this case, come from the much stronger reality of connection between my niece and myself.

### Life is not about being correct...

Coincidentally, on the same day of our joint playground adventure, I read a short text by Richard Rohr, founder of the 'Centre of Action and Contemplation'. In it he writes about the difference between being correct and being connected. He says:



Photo illustration(2): Pixabay

*'...Life is not about being correct but about being connected. At all costs, stay connected! Our only holiness is by participation and surrender to the Body of Love, not by any private performance contest. This is the joining of hands from generation to generation that can and will change the world. Love is One, and this Love is either shared and passed on or it is not the Great Love at all. The One Love is always eager, and, in fact, such eagerness is precisely the giveaway that we are dealing with something divine and infinite...'*

This text touched me and I thought of how different my life would be, if I always chose connection with others over being correct. It's not easy, though. I want to be right, I want to get my point across, or defend my position. Too quick am I with a judgement at times, as soon as someone tells me something I disagree with, or a 'Here we go again', at somebody's action whom I think I've known for a long time.

How to create connection? I suppose, it is possible by focusing on what unites us as human beings. We all have similar needs. All humans have a need for peace, safety, honesty, acceptance, affection, autonomy, a sense of purpose, to name just a few. The difficulties we encounter with each other, arise when our needs are in (apparent) conflict or when the strategies with which we'd like to meet our needs, differ. This is often the moment when hurt, tension, misunderstanding, fight and confusion occur.

### **The way of empathy**

What to do? Hearing, seeing and understanding someone's needs are often the first step towards encounter, rec-



onciliation and healing. Without this, people will always feel alone and cut off from others. If we hear, see and try to understand others, we practise a vision of a world where everyone's needs matter and we start to understand that many of our actions, opinions, world views or desires, are actually expressions of much deeper needs. By focusing our attention on the feelings and needs underneath words and behaviours, we can support each other to express ourselves in a way that leads to connection and we model for one another the capacity to empathize.

This, I suppose, opens the door to Love with a capital 'L'; that Love which Richard Rohr talks about in the paragraph above. And being connected in and through this Love, brings with it a joy and meaning to life that being correct could never give.