



## SHARED MISSION ENCOUNTER

### CLAUDINE, A WOMAN OF RELATIONSHIPS

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What can Claudine have to tell us about the Global Compact on Education? Evidently, she never used this expression but I believe she lived it and promoted it without knowing.

Today we will renew our way of looking at this woman whom we know already but who always has something new to tell us. We will contemplate her under 4 aspects of her personality which reveal her to us as a woman of healthy and just relationships.

- Claudine, woman of solidarity and protagonist of shared mission
- Claudine, woman of forgiveness and of healthy relationships
- Claudine, woman of wisdom and of just relationships
- Claudine, woman of the heart and pedagogue of kindness

We will observe her in concrete events of her life and this will open a few windows enlightening us on what she would say and do today if she participated in our gathering.

### **CLAUDINE, WOMAN OF SOLIDARITY AND PROTAGONIST OF SHARED MISSION**

#### Woman of solidarity

The Global Compact on Education is a path that aims at changing society. In her own way, Claudine contributed to a change in society and she did it with means that resemble those which the Compact promotes. Claudine was a woman of solidarity. She suffered in solidarity with her fellow-citizens during the French Revolution. She played her part in finding a solution in solidarity, within the consequences of this Revolution. Woman of solidarity, global compact.

Her participation cannot be found in the History books of France but it is not less real. A large number of girls on the street were able to access a life of dignity. Very many girls received an education of quality and a place within the society of Lyon. And in following years, thousands of children and young people received this type of education in many countries of the world. Claudine's solidarity with the misery of her time planted the seeds of an international solidarity in favour of innumerable youths. Is this not a magnificent collaboration with the Global Compact on Education?





## Protagonist of the shared mission

If Claudine had been invited to this encounter, I do not think we would have found her here in front but rather sitting among the participants. And if we asked her to tell us about her experience of shared mission, she would do so with simplicity and enthusiasm. She would probably say, “I began my mission as a lay person with other lay persons. I continued it with other religious and other lay people”. Yes, Claudine had learned the mission while she was a member of the Association of the Sacred Heart: young women who worked together to relieve the sufferings of the Revolution. Claudine firmly believed in this united commitment and that is why, even after the Congregation began, the Association continued. Today, it is found in many forms but that is where the roots of shared mission are.

Yes, but we know of other examples where Claudine counted on other persons to live the mission. Let us recall a few.

On the day when Father Coindre brought her two abandoned little girls, Claudine asked for the help of one of her friends to take care of them. Why? Because she perceived the difficulty of receiving them in her home as her mother was elderly and ill. It was her family situation which moved her to share the mission and I believe it was prophetic. Claudine always counted on others for the mission to be fruitful. Even at the beginning, when the members of the Association were looking for a place to live for the orphans, they knocked on the door of the Carthusian cells and on that of another Congregation to take care of the children.

Here is another example, less known perhaps. In the Memoriam, first history of the Congregation, the following fact is recounted: in order to find a house to replace that of Pierres-Plantées which had become too small, they went to pray at the church of St Paul; because the altar of St Aloysius Gonzaga was being repaired, they were told the Mass would be celebrated at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Until this point, the story is familiar to many of us. But here is the sentence that drew my attention in the Memorial. The author says, “Naturally, **we** told ourselves, “the Blessed Virgin must no doubt want to be in this somehow.” A similar phrase is attributed to Claudine but the difference here is that the author of the Memorial uses the “we”. I see it as a sign of the spirit of shared mission which was already found in the first group of sisters.

In this light, Claudine could tell us, “Shared mission is first of all an interior attitude before being an action.” Which specific needs invite us in our day and age to adopt a lifestyle based on shared mission? Do we see it as a lifestyle? Can we discern a value in shared mission itself?

What is your experience of shared mission? In a school? In a work with the poor? In a spirituality center? In a setting for welcoming refugees? In the AFJM? In a reflection team where you looked at situations together? In a provincial commission of shared mission?





## CLAUDINE, WOMAN OF FORGIVENESS AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The Global Compact on Education is fundamentally based on relationships. It speaks of fraternity, village, network, solidarity. Claudine was a woman of relationships and, as we like to say, a woman of healthy and just relationships. We have just mentioned two aspects of the healthy and just relationships of Claudine, solidarity and sharing. But before we explore other dimensions, let us examine the one which is, let us say, the foundation of all the others, her experience of forgiveness.

### From the wound to healing

We all know the story of Claudine faced with the death of her two brothers. Let us listen to it again as if it was the first time or perhaps we can remember the first time we heard it. Two young men commit themselves courageously to defend their city. They are betrayed and put into prison. Claudine visits them in their prison to comfort them as their elder sister and later she follows them to their execution and atrocious death. As we enter this scene, what happens within us? Revolt, sadness, desolation, frustration, fear, anguish. This is certainly what struggled within Claudine on that day: pain, despair: how to tell her mother...the rest of the family...Questions also: Why them? Why our family? Who betrayed them? Why this hatred? It is not fair, it is cruel...tears, clenched fists, need to find them and kiss them one last time, to stay there prostrated. We don't know how long these feelings filled the heart of Claudine.

What we do know is that she finally did forgive and her family did not denounce those who had betrayed them. How did Claudine pass from the wound to being healed? We do not know the steps but we can identify the signs leading that way. Using the Ignatian method, let us imagine Claudine entering her house; let us enter with her.

Let us contemplate Claudine and her mother crying for a long time then turning towards Jesus on the cross, asking him for the strength to live this trial as he did. These are the two steps from the wound to the healing: **crying and praying.**

But it is not automatic. Simultaneously, negative feeling persisted in her. She certainly went from denial to revolt and started to cry and to pray over and over again. She never forgot the wound and the horror of the death of her brothers and we know that she kept the mark in her body in the trembling which she called "my terror".





We observe Claudine remembering the events which she lived that day with her brothers. She recalls walking beside them, how she was able to recover the farewell letters hidden in their shoes. We are struck by their fraternal love and their attitude of deep surrender to the love of God. Here are a few extracts of the letters; "Do not reproach my loss to anyone...O you who carried us in your heart as you carried us in your womb...look for consolation in the mercy of God..." writes Louis, eldest of the two brothers. "Good-bye my good and dear sister, my too sensitive Gladys. It will be up to you to fulfill the painful task of consoling our mother..." adds François, the youngest brother. Claudine must have read and reread this letter and let it penetrate within her.

How many times must she have heard in her heart the extraordinary sentence gleaned from the lips of her brothers walking to their execution; "Forgive, Gladys, as we forgive." This sentence must have gone deep within her and gradually made place for forgiveness. This is another step in going from the wound to healing: **remembering dear ones and finding contact with them in our memory.**

Let us contemplate also, Claudine with her other brother and her sisters. They must have asked her over and over again to tell them the details of the events. Claudine did so. This telling of the story produced within her contradictory effects or rather complementary ones; retelling the events reopened the wound but at the same time it permitted the freeing of a load too heavy for one person to bear. This is the next step from the wound to the healing; **sharing with people in whom we trust.**

In fact, forgiveness can also be called inner healing. Claudine forgave and this brought her inner healing. How did that show? I believe it is by a complete reversal of perspective; faced with the horror of hatred, she refused to give in; she refused bitterness and vengeance and chose to give herself completely to healing the disorders of hatred and war. She could not bring her brothers back to life but she could give life to other victims of the Revolution. She had discovered that we do not forgive because the other person is right but because goodness has taken hold of our inner being.

Woman of healthy relationships.

From this experience of forgiveness and inner healing, Claudine was then able to live other relationships in a wholesome, which is to say, a healthy manner. What do we mean by healthy or wholesome relationships? We mean relationships that have been healed of resentment, of prejudice, of fear of others in their differences. Wholesome relationships have been liberated of biases and of selfishness.

### Relationships freed, healed of discouragement by going out of oneself

Faced with the horrors of the Revolution and the death of her brothers, Claudine could have been discouraged and turned in on herself. On the contrary, her relationships were healed and liberated, enabling her to turn towards the misfortune of others, especially the children roaming the streets. She did not give in to discouragement and the efforts she made to serve others freely and unselfishly renewed her courage and hope.





## Relationships freed and healed of resentment by trust

The revolutionaries continued to spread violence and also wanted to destroy the Providence which they considered competition, a threat for their work in silk-weaving. Claudine could have kept an attitude of resentment and even of vengeance towards them. Here is a quote from the Book of Anecdotes, (document of the beginnings of the Congregation) which shows how her relationships were wholesome and free of hatred. “She inspired trust such that the rebels themselves came to her for advice. ‘This is wrong, my friends, she told them. Your silk-weaving looms will stop and you will die of hunger. You had better return home.’ Many of the silk workers listened to her with perfect docility and quietly returned home.” (Book of Anecdotes, No 18). Here we see another dimension of the woman of relationships; she inspired trust and expressed her innermost convictions fearlessly.

## Relationships freed and healed of bitterness by friendship

With her Sisters, Claudine offered security and friendship. Here are two examples taken from the early documents of the Congregation. First of all, a quotation from the document called the Book of Anecdotes, “At the first sign of the insurrection of 1834, Mother St Ignatius, usually so calm, had a moment of terror and anguish recalling the terrible day of 1793.” We readily understand that her first movement would have been to exaggerate the situation but her strength of character soon took hold of her and she encouraged and led her daughters by her words and example.” (Book of Anecdotes, No 18) The other example is taken from the History of the Congregation by Contemporaries: “Let us look at a community meeting. The serious aspect of the reverend mother was transformed into charming kindness which rejoiced the hearts of her Sisters. Her kind smile welcomes you; you feel at ease and your soul expands.” (Chapter XIX). In her presence, people were at ease.

This friendship was manifested also towards the members of her family. She simply made herself close to family events such as the birth of a child, the illness of a family member, listening to worry in the face of a financial setback. We find numerous examples in her letters, especially those to her niece Emma. She questioned, she was compassionate, she rejoiced, she spoke to them of God. Claudine was not living in the clouds. Her relationships were full of tenderness and simplicity.

## Relationships freed and healed of defeatism by her sense of humour.

Claudine was a woman of serenity who did not dramatize even when the situation could really have been dramatic. Claudine’s had a wide outlook; she also had a good sense of humour of which we don’t often speak. Here is a quote from the Book of Anecdotes which will bring a smile. “Sœur St-Bernard tells us that following the riot of 1830, the authorities of Lyon developed the project of constructing a fortress at Fourvière, on the site of l’Angélique. Negotiations began with our Mothers on this subject but there was disagreement about the price of 25 000 francs.





The colonel in charge came one day to settle matter. Mother St Ignatius held her ground. The colonel left her saying, “You do not want to sell your property willingly; in a year from now it will be taken from you. Well, sir, she replied, we will see.” They took their leave courteously, the officer left, reverend Mother turned to me and said, “We have gained one year. In a time of revolution, one year is worth ten.” Claudine also knew how to create a healthy atmosphere at different levels.

A healthy atmosphere supposes a natural environment which fosters cheerfulness and relaxation. When Claudine was considering the purchase of the property of Fourvière, she was looking for a place where the children could play in security (far from busy city streets), a pleasant place. “How cheerfully they played in this spacious enclosure where their shouts and their songs mingled with the happy twittering of the birds, their brothers, and seemed to invite them to share in their playfulness. How happy and cheerful these young girls were! What a joy it was for them to breathe deeply the pure hilltop air! (Positio p. 554)

A healthy environment also supposes one which is psychologically favorable where people feel at ease. This atmosphere is what Claudine was able to create in Fourvière and has come down to us as “family spirit”. Claudine wanted the educators to be real mothers for the children and real sisters among themselves. I cannot resist telling you about an event which was not from Claudine but was from one of her first companions who later was to replace her as leader. The fact is taken from The Book of Anecdotes, No 38. “One day, upon her return from India, Mother St Thérèse took advantage of her visitation to change the way they had greeted each other until then; instead of saying Madam S., it became Sister S. She proudly announced this during a community meeting. This measure, in the thought of the worthy Mother, was a new link among the Sisters.” The healthy atmosphere is also manifested in the fact that Claudine invented activities to make the children happy and to develop their social education.

## CLAUDINE, WOMAN OF WISDOM AND OF JUST RELATIONSHIPS

Wholesome relationships but are also just relationships. What makes relationships just? Let us look at some examples from the life of Claudine which can bring us some answers.

### Relations adjusted to unforeseen situations: creativity

Just relationships are relationships that are adjusted to the unexpected and that show creativity. Claudine was a creative woman. To remove girls from their situation in the streets, she invented a pedagogy that included various ways to prepare young people for their future lives: basic academic and religious education (innovative for its time to educate the poor, especially girls); learning a trade that would allow them not to remain at the bottom of the social ladder (silk-weaving); involvement of young people in the constitution of a bank account in their name and preparation of a dowry to start their adult life.





## Decisions tailored to people: each person is unique

Just relationships are respectful relationships adjusted to different people. Claudine believed in the life forces that inhabited girls even under the cover of rags or bad habits of street children. We know her concept of education. Let us recall it here for the joy of us all: "The best leader is, not the one who inflicts the most punishments but the one who has the talent to avoid the most mistakes. It was, she said, the safest and most advantageous way to maintain order, do good and make the children happy around you." (History of the Congregation by Contemporaries, Chapter XIX, Positio p. 630).

And this was also true for adults: in her relationships, she respected each person and believed in the beauty of each one beyond appearances; she knew how to recognize the special gifts of each one. We remember the following anecdote: Seeing a young novice arrive, she perceived a particular talent for welcoming in this young woman and entrusted her with the service of welcoming people who arrived at home. This Sister held this position for many years to the delight of all those who knocked on the door of the house. Her relationships recognized the value of the human person: she was humble enough to rejoice in the successes of others.

## Relationships adjusted to differences between people: impartiality

Just relationships are impartial relationships.

Claudine was very sensitive on this point. She knew how to be both patient and demanding with the children but also with her collaborators, especially the Sisters. History mentions very everyday attitudes that go in this direction. Simple things, almost simplistic but that promote relationships: "We know how to listen without interrupting: everyone has the right to speak, each one gives her opinion and appreciation freely... (Positio p. 626)

Moreover, we remember her insistence: the only preferences I allow you are for the most difficult children, those who have the most defects. This is an adjustment that does not come naturally but is constructive for quality education.

## Relationships adjusted to events: informed decisions

Just relationships are relationships discerned wisely. When at some point, the Congregation no longer arrived in finances, Claudine of course prayed and made the Sisters pray. However, she was also able to make painful decisions. She did not do it without thinking, but she accepted the consequences. Since they could not keep the boarders and the orphans, she decided to keep the orphans. Was it a wise decision, a right decision? After all, the ones who brought money were the boarders. And yet, she chose to keep the orphans. It was a wisdom based on her priorities, on the priorities of the gospel: the poor first. Adopting just relationships sometimes means going against the logic that surrounds us.







Realism does not exclude audacity and Claudine has often shown this, she who often repeated: "God will provide". Let us remember the day when she acquired a huge property on the hill of Fourvière when she had no money. She relied on the help of a friend and on Providence. What was important to her and allowed her to take risks was her goal: to take care of the children and give them a future. In a healthy discernment, keeping the goal in mind and heart, this is what allows making right decisions.

### CLAUDINE, WOMAN OF HEART AND SOWER OF LIFE

Claudine said that an educator should be like a real mother. It is the source of pedagogy of kindness. And this is also true for male educators: to be sowers of life. Here we are at the heart of what it means to build healthy and just relationships. Where did Claudine get her ability to live healthy and just relationships?

In the Ignatian way, let us imagine that we are in Fourvière. Let us accompany Claudine in the heart of an ordinary day of her life and converse with her.

(One person joins me to represent Claudine)

Q, Claudine, why did you welcome street girls, even those who had an unpleasant attitude?

R. Your question surprises me. An unpleasant attitude always reveals something. This often reveals a great hidden wound. Why did I have a preference for those? It was precisely because they needed it most. This is what I also recommended to the Sisters: have preferences only for children who have the least good qualities.

Q. Claudine, where did your desire to make life grow for these children come from?

R. I think I can say that it just comes from my heart. When I walk the streets and see these children left to fend for themselves, it makes me tremble and cry. Maybe my heart is too sensitive, as my brothers used to tell me when they teased me at home. But their distress of body and soul pushes me to do something even if it is very small. Yes, it comes from within me.

Q. Claudine, does this also come from your experience of God's goodness?

R. Your questions force me to reveal my interior when I don't usually do it. But, yes, you are right, the ultimate source of my love of children and of all persons in fact is the goodness of our God who is good for the just and the unjust. You know, I have experienced it many times, this goodness of our God....







Q. Claudine, I just saw you give a special smile to a little girl. You understand them, don't you? How did you get there?

R. You know, when you really get close to people, you start to feel their inside. Wash and comb these poor little creatures, unload their heads from the revolting lice that invade it, pass them a fresh and clean garment, good shoes on their feet ... What a privilege in my eyes. What satisfaction for my heart. Yes, I believe that being close concretely is what opened me to them as persons.

Q. Claudine, I see that you consider children as people in their own right. Is that your secret?

R. I think so. In fact, it is looking with the eyes of the heart, beyond the outer limits. It has always worked well in my life, not only with children but with all people: looking at them from the heart.

Q. Claudine, I saw that you organize parties for children. Why is this important to you?

R. Moments of relaxation and celebration help build the family. These children have not known a family life. It is very important to make them feel that they matter to someone and that their joy is our joy. In fact, these holidays make me as happy as they are.

Q. Claudine, many religious and lay people are inspired by your life and your message. What would you like to say to those who will follow you later and everywhere?

R. Of course, people are following in my footsteps, but I can't give the answer. What comes to mind is a passage from the Gospel of John. After the resurrection, Jesus asks Peter the only important question: "Do you love me?" To Peter's affirmative answer, Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep, your brothers and sisters." In other words: Take care of the people you meet. And if you can, do it in the name of Jesus who takes care of you.

Q. Thank you Claudine, we will remember your message.

## CONCLUSION

We contemplated Claudine, a woman of healthy and just relationships.

Let us recall the different facets: relations of solidarity and sharing;  
relationships that replace the wound with healing;  
relationships healed from discouragement by going out of oneself;  
relationships freed from resentment by trust;  
relationships healed from bitterness through friendship;  
relationships that create a materially and psychologically healthy atmosphere;





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relationships adjusted to the unexpected through creativity;  
relationships adjusted to people, each unique;  
relationships adjusted to differences between people through impartiality;  
relationships adjusted to events by informed decisions.

Finally, let us recall what Claudine, a woman who speaks from her heart, told us at the end of the dialogue with her: "Take care of the people you meet. And if you can, do it in the name of Jesus who takes care of you."

