



Association suisse des Amis
de Sœur Emmanuelle

49, route de Sous-Moulin
1226 Thônex
+41 (0)22 348 20 85
info@asase.org
www.asase.org



LETTER TO FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

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*« What gives meaning to life is to love.
To love is to give everything, and to give
oneself. When you love, nothing is
impossible. »*

Dear Friends,

On June 19th, we celebrated an outstanding event: **the 90th birthday of Michel Bittar, the founder of our association!**

It all began with a check received by **Sister Emmanuelle**. Always driven by her intuition and determination, she tracked down the generous donor with the help of friends in Geneva.

She then convinced Michel Bittar, with her trademark spirit and persuasiveness, to fulfill one of her most urgent wishes: **to raise \$100,000 to build a compost plant in Cairo**, intended for a population living off scavenging in the Egyptian capital's landfills.

This is how the idea of founding **a Swiss association** was born. A pioneering initiative, born from an encounter as unlikely

as it was providential. Associations in France, Belgium and Austria would then follow. For the fate of this extraordinary nun, who chose to spend her retirement caring for the poorest, leaves no one indifferent.

Driven by an unwavering faith, Sister Emmanuelle does not shy away from anything: poverty, deplorable living conditions, stench, oppressive heat, violence. On the contrary, she draws her strength from it. She even said that her 22 years spent with the rag-pickers in the slums of Azbet el-Nakhl, then Mokattam, were years of exaltation.

There, she opened schools, created a playground, a sewing workshop, a dispensary, and of course, a compost plant. She actively worked to connect the slum to running water and electricity. Nothing seemed out of reach for the woman some would call **"the leader of the rope team to the heights of charity."**



Michel Bittar and Florence Rivollet, June 2023. Photo : Isabel Gaillard

In 1986, the situation in Sudan deteriorated. An Islamist movement had taken control of the government. Michel, a native of the country, heard the call of a cousin who had opened a home in Khartoum for street children forced to flee the civil war ravaging the south of Sudan. Soon overwhelmed, Michel appealed to Sister Emmanuelle. She agreed to commit herself to helping these unfortunate people.

Together, they raised funds to build reed schools, where meals were distributed to 50,000 pupils, to create homes for war orphans and to set up vocational training workshops for displaced populations living in camps around the capital.

After more than 30 years of dedication to the association with his committee, Michel Bittar, always a visionary, felt the need to surround himself and start a new stage: professionalizing the association in order to meet the growing demands of public institutions.

It was his son, Patrick, who first answered the call in 2007 and soon became the director of the association. Three years later, in 2010, I joined them for a one-off assignment: bringing the financial statements into line with Swiss standards.

I was quickly struck by Michel Bittar's intelligence, generosity, and charisma. Inspired by his vision and commitment, I agreed to serve as Treasurer, and then, at his request, as President four years ago. Thanks to the privileged exchanges we had while managing this magnificent project, which has become a shared one, we have built a sincere and precious relationship, the kind that only life can offer.

And for that, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Sister Emmanuelle, who brought us together: may her spirit continue to inspire our shared journey and the association's actions for a long time to come!

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South Sudan is facing an increasingly difficult political, economic, and humanitarian context.

The country is threatened by the resuming of the civil war, but the rebel groups are weakened and dispersed, with no clearly recognized leader. President Kiir has maintained the military advantage and succeeded in dividing his opponents. The situation remains fragile, however, as militias are reorganizing on the Ethiopian border, and a possible trial of their former leader, Machar, could reignite tensions.

The exchange rate has deteriorated sharply: it has gone from 4200 SSP/\$ to 5700 SSP/\$ since Patrick's visit last October, a loss of 36% in value in six months!

Good news: **the City of Geneva's support is renewed!**

We are pleased to announce that the City of Geneva is extending its support for the "Vocational Training + Income-Generating Programs" project for the period 2025-2027.

This is an invaluable support, in an increasingly unstable context, of a project that continues to meet strong local demand: the 9 trainings offered have recorded a record number of applications for the current session, with 1970 applicants for 451 places (4.3 times more applications than places, compared to 2.3 times more for the 2022-2024 period)!

Unfortunately, **the suspension of USAID grants** is affecting the work of several local NGOs, for which our local partner was providing customized training.

However, during Betram's visit to Geneva in May, an unexpected meeting with the South Sudanese ambassador suggested a possible revival of the partnership with UNICEF for cold chain management training. To date, only 130 agents have been trained, out of the planned 1000.

Another project to train 25 young people is also under negotiation with UNICEF.

Your support is more valuable than ever.

Thanks to you, we can continue to train, care for, feed, and support those who need it most.

I remind you that **95% of donations collected by our association are allocated to programs**, thanks to the volunteer commitment of the majority its active members, who also cover most of its overhead costs.

Many thanks for your commitment and generosity!

Florence Rivollet
President