

Newsletter 2004



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Many have greeted the newsletter coming out after the CIB Conference meeting in Sydney, 2003, giving information for the regions. It has been translated into several languages and can be found on the CIB website (www.benedictines-cib.com). This year at the Conference meeting in Assisi Sept. 16 - 20, there was again a request for a newsletter taking up the information passed round at the meeting. For the first time the organisers of the meeting consciously set as their aim an encounter with the monasteries of the region as a way of building up the network. After a very successful meeting the CIB Conference members were invited to participate at the Abbots' Congress in Rome. On the agenda was a vote of the abbots on an updating of the Lex Propria to include the relationship between the Confederation and the CIB. The outcome is a crowning of the work of the CIB Conference done so far and was greeted by men and women alike with great joy. Sr. Monica Lewis OSB

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Recognition of the CIB by the Abbots' Congress

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Saturday September 25th was the big day for the CIB in the Abbots' Congress. After some hard work over several years, our canonical adviser, Abbot President Richard Yeo, helped by Abbess Joanna Jamieson of Stanbrook, had worked out a text he could suggest to the Abbots' Congress for some changes in the Lex Propria of the Benedictine Confederation of 1985. At that time, there was no CIB. Even the Abbot Primate's Commission of Benedictine Women did not yet exist. There was a short Chapter in the Lex Propria of 1985 on the „Commission for Nuns“ and the „Commission for Sisters“ that existed at that time, but the development of the CIB over the past 20 years meant that it was by now quite out of date. The main change suggested by Abbot Richard was, that this chapter be replaced by a new one entitled: „Collaboration between Benedictine Women.“ (The full Latin text of Nrs. 7.8.9. can be found on page 12)

[List of present members of the CIB Conference](#)

Abbot Richard introduced this suggested text very helpfully and clearly, and there was time for the abbots to ask questions. But in good Benedictine tradition, the vote was not taken immediately. Everyone had the opportunity over Sunday to reflect on what it would mean for the Confederatio Benedictina to have this chapter on the CIB in its Lex Propria. „The Confederation will be providing an umbrella under which the CIB can exist in the eyes of the Church“ Abbot Richard had said in his exposition. That must have convinced nearly everyone. On Monday morning the vote was taken, and an overwhelming majority of the Abbots accepted the change.

M. Maire remarked in her word of heartfelt thanks on behalf of the CIB to the Abbots' Congress, that the umbrella image, though not specially biblical, would probably be all right with St. Benedict and St. Scholastica. She pointed out that an umbrella is useful when it is raining or as a parasol when the sun is too hot. But she is hoping for good weather too, when we won't be needing the umbrella, but can just be getting on side by side before the face of the Lord with our monastic life and mission.



CIB CONFERENCE MEETING 2004

ASSISI, September 16 - 20.

Welcome address of M.Giacinta Soverino OSB

On behalf of the Benedictine Community of St. Giuseppe of Assisi, but also on behalf of all the Benedictine monasteries of nuns and sisters present in Italy and as their representative, I would like to welcome you all amongst us. Even though we live in different continents, we all have the same Rule, the same founder. Because of this, we find that we are not separated but really united.

It would surely be more "Benedictine" if instead we were in Norcia, where St. Benedict was born, or at Subiaco, where he lived both as a hermit and as a coenobite in the early years of monastic life, or better still in Monte Cassino, where our founder expressed his monastic maturity by writing the Rule. But in our days I think that it is very good to meet in Assisi, the city of dialogue, where we are here united because we want to dialogue, seeking to learn to know and to collaborate with one another. Assisi asserts itself as being a world-wide appeal to unity for those who believe in Christ, and for the followers of other religions. Why then should it not also be the centre of communion for the followers of the Benedictine Rule, always in the name of Christ?

Let me express my sincere wishes to you all that these days may contribute to the growth of Benedictine Communion and fraternity amongst us all. Thank you for coming here, for being here



.Dialogue with Italian Benedictine Women 2004

That the annual Conference meeting 2004, normally taking place one day before the Abbots' Congress, should not be in S.Anselmo, but rather in Assisi, was an idea born in Australia 2003, when discussing how to develop dialogue with the monasteries in each region.

During the meeting of the CIB Conference in Australia the union of all Benedictine superiors in Australia and New Zealand was meeting at the same time as the CIB Conference and it was possible to share much time together, in the liturgy, over meals and on outings, making it possible to speak informally with each other and learn about each other. Similarly there was a number of Good Samaritan sisters helping in secretarial work or on the liturgical commission, who shared the days of the meeting with us. Sharing the liturgy, the meals, the outings, helped the mixed company of Australians and Delegates to grow together, building bridges to each other, learning about each other, about the differences and what we have in common. The fact that there was a common language (only a few of the Members of the CIB Conference do not speak English) made the process easier. But also the experience of mingling with each other was important and showed us the way forward.

It is therefore no wonder that M.Giacinta stressed the aspect of dialogue at the meeting in Assisi.

There are 150 monasteries in Italy listed in the Catalogue 2000. This is incomparably more than the 10 or so monasteries represented on the Australian and New Zealand Benedictine Union. So in Italy there are bigger bridges to be built both in terms of the number of Benedictine Women in Italian monasteries, and also because of the difficulty of language. However a small beginning was made and a group of 30 abbesses and sisters came for a 24 hour gathering from midday September 17th - midday September 18th. Central for this gathering was the preparation for dialogue. A minimal amount of time was taken for introducing everyone, and then an attempt was made to bring English speakers and Italian speakers together. Because of the large number of Filipina sisters in Assisi and the neighbouring Bastia, and because several Italian sisters from other communities offered their services as translators, it was possible to create 15 small groups of four to five sisters each, one of these being the translator, in which Italians and members of the CIB Conference met with each other to speak about their monastic experience. Also Spanish speakers in Italian communities from Mexico and El Salvador enjoyed the opportunity of meeting the Conference members from Argentine, Mexico and Spain and acted as translators for the Italians. The content of the discussion had been well prepared beforehand. ***The talk given in Australia by Sr. Margaret Malone on reconciliation in the Rule of St. Benedict had been sent to everyone, and many Italian participants had discussed this paper in their communities and had written down their ideas on the subject. This helped to make sharing more personal, more immediate.*** Despite the difficulty in creating balanced groups when one does not know sufficiently the gifts of the people involved, the large amount of time given to group-work on the morning of September 18th was greeted as a success. Despite the hard work in translating and in trying to listen and understand the others, the ice was broken across the language barrier and recognition of the gifts on each side began to appear. We still have a long way to go, but initial reserve disappeared, readiness to reach out to the other grew and joy at successful communication filled the gathering during the closing ritual.

Dialogue is not only made possible by talking with each other but also by the place where one meets. The welcoming atmosphere of the monastery of S.Giuseppe, the obvious joy of M.Giacinta having us in Assisi, the preparatory work of Sr. Mariangela and the other members of the community, the shared liturgy and the evening with the young Filipina sisters who entertained us with dance, were all elements that helped to make us relaxed, where non-verbal communication was as important as communication in words. Singing together "***Laudate si, mi Signore***", "***be praised, o my Lord***" - the prayer of St. Francis - gave us words understood by all.



BENEDICTINE WOMEN IN ITALY

According to the Catalogus Monasteriorum OSB sororum et monialium 2000 there are five federations of moniales in Italy: the Federation Centro-Meridionalis with 10 monasteries, the Federation Piceni-Marchae Inferioris with 13 monasteries, the Federation Italiae Septentrionalis with 10 monasteries, the Federation Tusciae with 7 monasteries and the Federation Umbrae-Marchiae with 9 monasteries. Since 2000 some of these monasteries have been closed, and many share the difficulties common in Europe of few vocations and ageing communities, but there are also a number of monasteries that are thriving. These five Federations are in close contact with each other and their superiors have annual gatherings. Besides these Federations there are 100 addresses of Benedictine Women, moniales and sorores living in Italy. Some belong to international congregations like the Benedictines of Perpetual Adoration or the Camaldolese Congregation. Some are smaller or larger congregations of Benedictine sisters. Each have their own history and their own structures and have more or less contact with other Benedictines. There is however as yet no network of communication for these houses between each other.

Those present at the meeting spoke of strong movements of renewal after Vatican II which opened up the possibility of monastic and theological studies for young Benedictine Women in formation. They spoke of the liturgy being sung in many communities with great care, using both Italian and Latin. The use of the harp for accompanying the psalms seems to be popular in a number of communities. However the lack of a network including all Benedictines in Italy makes it difficult to have a full picture of the monastic scene in its whole spectrum.



The Assisi meeting - an encounter between
St. Francis and St. Benedict

For many of the members of the CIB Conference this was a first experience of the beautiful walled town of Assisi, the town of St. Francis, with its mediaeval streets, houses and churches, restored after the devastating earthquake of 1997. The Benedictines of Assisi of the 13th century befriended St. Francis and St. Clare and provided the buildings for the first convent of Poor Clares at S. Damiano. The Benedictine monastery of St. Giuseppe, where this year our meeting took place, was founded in the year of St. Francis death, 1226, almost next door to the house of the bishop, where St. Francis took off his clothes and gave them back to his father, wishing to give up all possessions in this world. Just beyond that is the basilica of Santa Chiara, built shortly after the death of St. Clare and where the community of Poor Clares of Sant'Damiano moved in 1260. There, during our meeting, the flourishing community of Poor Clares at the tomb of the saint, invited us to take part in their beautifully sung Vespers on September 17th, for us the feast of St. Hildegard, for them the feast of the stigmata of St. Francis. In quiet prayer before the cross of St. Francis, originally in Sant'Damiano, we brought the aspirations and needs of all Benedictine Women before God. It was in prayer before this cross that Our Lord spoke from this crucifix to St. Francis saying: "Go, Francis, and repair my house; as you see it is falling into ruin." On Sunday morning Sr. Maria Kolkiootsa, ofm, the Franciscan friend of our hosts who translated for us, took us to the birth place of St. Francis and to the Basilica, built 1230 and decorated with many famous frescos by Giotto and his school. There we prayed at the tomb of St. Francis in Polish and English for God's blessings for our monasteries. There, in the chapel of peace, situated in the monastery of Franciscan friars next to the Basilica, we celebrated the Eucharist and prayed the prayer of St. Francis: "Make me a channel of your peace." In the afternoon many of us visited the church of Sant'Damiano and were deeply touched by the peaceful atmosphere there. It seems that St. Francis still has much to say to Benedictines today.



Below is an abridged version of the report given by the Moderator, Abbess Máire Hickey, to the meeting of the Conference on the morning of September 17th.

Moderator's Report to the CIB Conference, Assisi September 2004

My dear Sisters,

I would like to preface my report by drawing your attention to a document that has been in circulation for some months. Some of you will know it, others will not. It is a working paper put out by a group from the two

international unions of superiors general, the UISG and the USG, in preparation for the Congress on Consecrated Life being held in Rome in November of this year. The overall objective of the Congress is, „**to discern together, with global awareness, what the Spirit of God is bringing about among us, where the Spirit is leading us, and how we can respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God for the common good**“ (1 Cor 12, 7).“

This formulation of the overall objective of the Congress on Consecrated Life was a help to me as I was preparing for this meeting, because it gave me the words I was looking for to open my report. Is that not exactly what we as Superiors of women's monasteries living according to the Rule of St. Benedict are trying to do. Isn't that exactly the reason why Benedictine sisters and nuns got together over 30 years ago to develop an organisation, an international communion, that would help us in this task? It is a sign of the working of the Spirit in the Church that UISG and USG have planned this Congress right now with these aims. It is also a sign of the working of the Spirit that such ideas come to birth not just at UISG/USG level but at many other levels too, and in different ways. Specifically as Benedictine women, sisters and nuns, we too are seeking to discern together with global awareness, what the Spirit of God is bringing about among us, **where the Spirit is leading us, and how we can respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God for the common good.**

Our profile as an international Communion of Benedictine women is not yet as clear as it will one day become, please God. The CIB is still a young organisation, we are still involved in building up our foundations. That is why a lot of what I report on concerns organisational and business matters. Let us take the UISG/USG working-paper as a timely cue right now to keep us focused on our core-aims. Let us bear in mind constantly and untiringly - even while listening to reports about the mundane activities of our organisation - that this and nothing else is what we are about.

Looking back over the year that has passed since we met in Sydney, I can report on continual, steady progress in the work on the building the foundation of the CIB.

- M. Joanna and Abbot Richard have prepared our application, to be presented next week to the Abbots' Congress in S. Anselmo, for an express recognition of the CIB in the Lex Propria of the Confoederatio Benedictina. Once the Abbots have given their approval, we have reached a goal we set ourselves 5 years ago in St. Louis.
- The preliminary clarifications necessary for acquiring legal status for the CIB have progressed. We have established that it would be feasible for us to found an association from within the CIB, recognised in German law as a juristic person, thus making it possible to accept donations with tax reduction. During our meeting we shall be presenting the results of our research to the Conference in more detail and asking for your mandate for the Administrative Council to continue down this road.
- Plans for the Symposium 2006 are under way. At this meeting we shall be finalising decisions about the theme. We have drawn up Guidelines for all those involved in preparing CIB Symposia, and this together with the considerable experience we have gathered through 4 Symposia and our Colloquium 2000, will contribute to our meetings having a mark of our Benedictine charisma and of woman's search for God and His service in the world of the 21st century.

The CIB is not a structure that organises jurisdiction or power. Each monastery, congregation, federation continues in the canonical structures it has hitherto had. ***We are rather a spirit-inspired communications network for the women's monasteries consociated with the Confoederatio Benedictina, with broad aims of bringing women's monasticism, lived according to the Rule of St. Benedict, into the 21st century.*** Communication within this network advances from year to year. Benedictine women all around the world are getting to know each other, getting to encourage each other in our common monastic way of life, learning to collaborate in order to promote our aims. Each passing year brings me as Moderator - and probably many of you too in her own region and her own field of experience - into contact with sectors of Benedictine life to-day that are new to me. I would like to share with you a few experiences I have had in the past year and a few thoughts and questions that occur to me at this point.

The first Symposium, held in 1987, achieved the „Great Leap Forward“ of bringing Moniales and Sorores OSB together for the first time to share their experiences of their different forms of consecrated life in a common Benedictine spirituality. The encounter and the sharing that began in 1987 continue to bear fruit for all who participate. For many it is an encouragement and an inspiration to know of the existence of CIB and to receive information and reports, even if they never come to a meeting. Maybe we shall never reach everyone. That doesn't need to happen. But when we see that there are areas that we are not reaching so well, I believe we should ask ourselves what is happening here. It strikes me that although there are many moniales who have made very valuable contributions to the building up of CIB, it is generally speaking easier to get participation from Sisters than from Moniales. There are certainly many different reasons for this, and I don't claim to know all of them. But I believe we should keep this fact in mind and be trying to understand its implications for us.

Reading the UISG/USG working paper, I was impressed to register how the apostolic congregations (the monasteries of moniales are not members of UISG) have been discovering renewals as they respond over the years to the giving-up of many of their apostolic works, by seeking to deepen the contemplative dimension of their Christian vocation. They are integrating their deep love of the Scriptures and their longing for union with God in prayer into their reflections on the situation of the people they minister to, the problems of globalisation, the powerlessness of the poor of every sort, and into their efforts to sow seeds of peace and fraternity wherever they are (VC 108, UISG paper p. 17).

I wondered how monasteries of moniales, including our Benedictine monasteries, would respond to this paper. What would be their comment? Would they find the contemplative dimension as they themselves understand it and seek to live it reflected in these pages? I am sure they would to some extent, but I am pretty sure that some would say „Yes, but there is something essential to our understanding of Christian contemplative life that I don't find reflected in this working paper.“ I believe that this touches something vital for consecrated life, for the Church, for the Reign of God. **And I believe that the CIB, being made up of women living the various different forms of monastic life, has a unique opportunity of exploring in community the contemplative heart of Christian life and Christian love - not just in theology and in academic research but in real life - and in opening doors for people of all walks of life to discover it for themselves and to respond.**

As Benedictine women of the 21st century, we want to be sharing the message of Subiaco with the Church and the world. When we visit Subiaco, as you all know, we go into the Grotto of Adoration and Contemplation, where Benedict spent much time in prayer. And we go into the Grotto of the Shepherds, where he spent time teaching the people of the area who came to him for instruction, encouragement and the consolations of the faith. All our monasteries have, virtually, within their walls, a Grotto of Contemplation and a Grotto of the Shepherds, and each of us moves from one to the other. Each monastery, each congregation has its own particular profile deriving from the place these two Grottoes have in the life and mission of the community and of individuals. More than maybe any other family in Consecrated Life we have the message that these two Grottoes, embracing the many different profiles of monastic life, are inextricably linked with each other.

I believe many moniales have things to share about their experience of the two Grottoes that would be an enrichment for us to hear. And maybe they would discover enrichment and ongoing help for themselves through hearing more from those already involved and those who follow different forms of Benedictine life. As I get to know more and more communities, it is becoming clearer to me, that the form of monastic life embodied in the monasteries of moniales has something that is essential for all Benedictines, just as the more enclosed monasteries can greatly benefit from the competences of the more open communities, in situations where they are being challenged to continue to live their charism in the rapidly changing climate of the post-modern world. How can each of us discover the balance between the two Grottoes that is right for her and her community to be passing on the message of the Gospel through the monastic life-form? The network of the CIB will help each of us in her search for this balance.

I have been in touch with and visited many monasteries over the past few years. It is always a great joy and enrichment. It is a huge privilege to be the recipient of so much trust, as a community shares its riches, its hopes, its problems. There are some very young and fragile projects in need of teaching and wise encouragement, others who have come to a cross-roads and who need support from within the Benedictine family in order to realise a courageous vision. I see others where lack of modern skills - business skills, communication and leadership skills, - can cause enormous waste of spiritual energy, others that will almost certainly be closed before very long, because no young sisters have come to join them for many years. The CIB cannot solve financial or personnel problems for any community, nor can it disentangle the conflicts that can bedevil the best of communities. But the CIB can help us to pool our resources and to continue to learn from each other. We can strengthen each other through sharing our zeal for authentic monastic life, centred exclusively on Jesus Christ, God become human for us, as the person to whom we prefer no-one and nothing, and passionately committed to Him in our brothers and sisters.

The UISG paper asks: „**What is the Holy Spirit raising up in consecrated life to-day? How do we identify it, describe it and present it? To what new wells and new paths is this emerging consecrated life drawing us?**“ My dear sisters, the CIB exists to help Benedictine nuns and sisters all over the world to look for the specific Benedictine answers to these questions. We want to help each other, whether our form is that of the moniales or that of the sorores, to be authentic Benedictines in the 21st century, and to allow the Spirit of the Risen Lord to make our lives fruitful for the Reign of His Father.



SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT (RB, Prol 17; Ps. 34:15)

The talk given by Sr. Margaret Malone in Sydney 2003 with this title was distributed to the participants before the meeting in Assisi, asking them to consider what interested them and what challenged them most in this paper. The discussion in groups on reconciliation was an attempt to use our meetings to deepen our understanding of monastic life and to learn from one-another. Four members of the CIB Conference were asked to form a panel and to speak of an experience of reconciliation. Here are some extracts from what they said:

If the grace of God fails to touch the heart, neither advice, exhortation nor actions will achieve much; they cannot lead to conversion..... (quoted by M.Henriette)



An experience in Retreat

Last year we could not find a preacher for our annual retreat, so we decided to do it on our own with the text of the Pater Noster. We agreed to hold a penitential rite when we reached the part "forgive us our trespasses..." Gathered together in a room that we all appreciate very much - it is beautiful, the chairs in a circle, in the middle of the room a focus: a piece of material from Tanzania with a Sacred Heart, a gift from a missionary friend, with little stones all around it. After a time to create an atmosphere, with canticles and readings, we started to accuse ourselves in a spontaneous way, placing a stone over the Sacred Heart on the floor. We could choose where to put it: over the heart, the hands, the head, the feet... where it was more significant to each one. I was deeply moved to see that all the sisters accused themselves. It took us more time than usual to come to the end of this celebration. On the last day of the retreat, the part of the Pater Noster was "Thy Kingdom come!"; for once we did not take the invocations by the natural order. Gathered together again around the Sacred Heart, which remained there with the stones over him, we started to share the highlights of the retreat. After each sharing we took our stone from the floor and put it inside a transparent vase of water, as a sign of being born anew, that everything was cleansed by the water of our Baptism and that a new life had begun. This kind of litany went on with the rhythm of canticles and refrains. It was a very important and strong impulse for each one of us. (M. Vera Lucia Horta)

<p><u>A Maundy Thursday ritual</u></p> <p>Every year on Maundy Thursday, at the end of Lauds, we go in procession to chapter. After the reading of chapter 72 of the rule, we are invited to wash each other's hands as a sign of our desire to serve one another in love and humility..... In carrying out this ceremony, each one bears in her heart and prayer the sister with whom she may be having a difficult relationship; later in the day, she may search out that sister with a personal gesture to her as a way of asking pardon and reconciliation. Once the ritual is completed, each sister, according to her rank of profession, may acknowledge in the presence of the community her failings and lack of charity, and ask their forgiveness. After the last fault is acknowledged, an exhortation is given, inviting us to cast ourselves into the burning heart of the Saviour's love. That evening the traditional ceremony of the mandatum takes place during which the Prioress washes the feet of twelve of the sisters, thus beginning the celebration of the Last Supper and the commencement of the Pascal Triduum.</p> <p>(M. Henriette Wendbala Kalmogo)</p>	<p><u>The tools of St. Benedict</u></p> <p>My community is made up of nuns from two different communities.... which means, it has nuns who have personally experienced the joys and sorrows of this event of fusion and feel it present in their daily lives even up to now. Moreover, the "new ones", that is, those who did not belong to either one of the above mentioned communities, come from different countries..... The result therefore is a quite varied group which because of its diversity lives a difficult daily stability. We perform the usual rites: the recitation of the Our Father during the Liturgy, recommended by St. Benedict expressly because of "the thorns of discord which are likely to break out... and hence for the purification from such faults. (RB 13, 12 - 13), the sign of peace during the Eucharistic celebration, Communion at the same Holy Table..... There are meetings of reconciliation both between the nuns themselves and between the nuns and the abbess. It is she who acts as mediator to bring peace back to those who have difficulties with life in community.</p> <p>(M. Giacinta Soverino)</p>
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A COMMUNITY THAT HAS NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT RECONCILIATION, HAS NOTHING TO SAY...

Reconciliation in history

...we celebrated the jubilee year of the death of our five Benedictine missionaries..... Gathered around an altar in front of the memorial cross we celebrated the Eucharist in thanksgiving for our five missionaries who had come to spread the Gospel..... Abbot Dionys of Ndanda Abbey called forward one of the elders of the parish. He belonged to the tribe of the Wamatumbi, who had been the leaders in the maji-maji uprising and responsible for the killing of the missionaries. The Abbot apologised for the mistakes the missionaries had made in the past by not understanding and not respecting the beliefs and the customs of the country they had come to evangelise. These mistakes were part of the reason for the uprising. The elder in turn asked for forgiveness for the murder. We were touched by this reconciliation..... It took a hundred years for this moment of reconciliation to crystallise. It is God's gift, but it is also a response of God's people from hearts which have been tempered in suffering..... a symbol of this are the crystals that need very many years to become beautiful gems.

(M. Irene Dabalus)

Reconciliation between two sisters

A meeting is organised in the presence of the Mother Prioress. After a moment of prayer (the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the reading of a passage of Scripture, a brief prayer of each sister for the other), the two sisters are invited, each in turn, to explain her own point of view. Each one is allowed to speak until she is finished without being interrupted, and in an atmosphere of listening, welcome and respect. Very often there is a happy outcome and the interview concludes in the most promising way for a resumption of a good and friendly relationship between the two parties. (M.Henriette Wendbala Kalmogo)



A Benedictine Spirit at a big gathering

Have you had difficulty when organising a gathering in maintaining an atmosphere that is in keeping with the Rule of St. Benedict?

At the meeting in Assisi the Administrative Council presented guidelines for preparing a big gathering of Benedictine Women. Taking up the aspects of the Rule of St. Benedict which speak of seeing Christ in one another, they spell out how this can be lived in an international gathering where many are new, where the support of a familiar timetable is not there, and fatigue after a long journey lessens one's ability to be open and sensitive to one's surroundings. Another difficulty at large meetings is that they can be so full of interesting and informative activity, that the focus of the Word of God with space to listen to the Spirit can be forgotten. The Administrative Council suggest asking someone to be especially responsible for attending to the following points:

HOSPITALITY

- Create an atmosphere of attentiveness to one another
 - Those who are more familiar with the surroundings assist those who may be new to the place, new to the people.
- Companionship one another - being supportive to one another
 - those who know the place already make a special effort to befriend someone new.
- Be sensitive to all cultures
 - so that all are able to participate comfortably (i.e. languages used, translations available, customs in liturgies, etc.)
- Be aware in the planning that a male institution may require adjustments on the part of women in attendance
- Be respectful of individual needs

CENTRALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

- Enthroned the Scriptures in a central location in the prayer and/or meeting space
- Liturgy and Lectio should be the focal point in the schedule (awareness of the themes for the day)
 - Examples:
 - Discussions may be organised in such a way that they can easily include Scriptural texts
 - Lectio may be part of the process (both individual and shared lectio). Shared lectio might be used during common prayer times and/or as part of structure of discussions.
 - opportunities to meet for silent prayer (spaces set aside for such)

This remains an ideal, but the suggestion to keep these aspects in mind and to appoint someone to look for ways of realising them is a valuable and helpful idea.



NEWS ITEMS

Changes of Delegates

There have been elections in the following regions with a change of delegate to the CIB Conference:

Region 10 (Mexico) Sr. Josephine Markiewicz of Mexico City takes the place of M.Inés Sánchez Rendón

Region 12 (Cono-Sur) M.María Teresa Ferrari of Rafaela, Argentine takes the place of M.Letitia Riquelme

Region 13 (Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan): M.Dolores Hong of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Seoul takes the place of M.Cecilia Jeon (M.Luca Chin had represented the region as substitute at the meeting in Australia)

Region 14 (Philippines): Mother Mirijam Alejandrino, Prioress General of the Sisters of the Eucharistic King takes the place of Mother Angelica Leviste. She was represented in Assisi by her Substitute M.Celeste Nidea.

Region 18 (Southern Africa) M. Theodora Ntuli of Twasana Convent, Vryheid, South Africa, takes the place of M.Irmengard Poroto. M.Theodora was a member of Abbot Primate's Commission for 6 years in the nineties.

Administrative Council

M.Jolanta Rzoska of Zarnowiec in Poland has been asked to join the Council. She already attended the meeting in May. Meanwhile M.Irmgard Poroto has gone out of office leaving a vacancy which hopefully will be filled soon. Sr. Judith Ann Heble is going out of office as Prioress of her community and as President of the Conference of American Prioresses in January 2005 and Sr. Sonia Wagner goes out of office as Prioress General in October 2005. M.Máire Hickey's term of office as abbess ends November 2007.

Deaths

M.Máire remembered

Abbess Flavie de Vanssay of Limon who had been on the nuns' commission at the beginning in 1974 and who died this year,

Abbess M. Luzia Ribeiro de Oliveira, from Belo Horizonte who had also been on the nuns' commission in the beginning and who died very recently, and

Abbess emerita Agatha Rohtert of Dinklage who had been asked to research the historical development of the relationship between Benedictine men and women in the 19th and 20th centuries for Abbot Primate's Commission and who died six weeks ago. Her book, first published in German as "Werdendes Gleichgewicht" has recently been printed in English under the title: "A Vision will come true". (orders can be addressed to Sr. Monica Lewis, abtei@abteiburgdinklage.de)

International communities

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf spoke enthusiastically of the possibility of setting up international communities in important geographical centres, if this is done in the right way. At the moment such an international community is being set up at S.Pauls before the walls in Rome and despite false rumours he sees this getting off to a good start. Other examples of international communities are Le Source in Paris (men) and Dormitio in Jerusalem (men). He spoke of two models for international communities, one seeking a balance of representation from all round the world, the other keeping strong links to one region yet taking in many from other countries. The latter model can be seen at the Dormitio in Jerusalem. In Israel no vocations come from the small Christian community there and it is necessary to foster a strong sense of belonging to the monastic scene in Germany. The German speaking monasteries support the monastery in Jerusalem financially, because the present political situation has cut down the number of pilgrims to the Holy Land, thus closing an important source of revenue.

In this context the problems and visions for the future of the Benedictine women on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and in the monastery of Vanves in Paris were discussed. M.Máire repeated that the CIB is not in a position to solve the many problems of ageing monasteries, but encouraged the building up of a network of support. Ideally it should be possible to bring up these questions in one's own region and to find a pool of experience and support there.

Website

The CIB is now on-line. The address is www.benedictines-cib.com Information for the website can be sent to Sr. Monica Lewis abtei@abteiburgdinklage.de and she will pass it on.

A contemplative community in the Vatican

The Benedictine community of Rosano has been asked to set up a community in the convent Mater Ecclesia in the Vatican for the next five years. Mater Ecclesiae has the specific task of praying for the Holy Father. The Benedictines were preceded by Poor Clares and Carmelites. The monastery of Rosano is a thriving Italian community in Pontassieve, Italy.

Symposium 2006

The next Symposium will take place in Sant'Anselmo September 7 - 14, 2006 with a meeting of the CIB Conference on September 6 and on September 15, with the election of the Administrative Council for the next four years. The proposed theme of the Symposium will be "Leadership". Various aspects of this theme were suggested at the meeting in Assisi, but it remains for the Administrative Council to develop the suggestions and to invite speakers. As at the Symposium 2002 there will be an invitation for one sister from each region who made her final profession within the past five years. The numbers of invitations for each region will be made known at the next Conference meeting

CIB Conference meeting 2005

The next annual meeting of the CIB Conference will take place in Poland from September 5th - 15th, 2005. There will be a business meeting in Warsaw September 6th, 7th and 8th and the other days are reserved for visits to Polish communities.

Secretariat for the CIB in Assisi

M. Giacinta offered the CIB the use of a room in her monastery as secretariat for the CIB. This was greeted enthusiastically as plans for a secretariat in S.Anselmo have not materialised and the need for rooms to set up archives is growing from year to year. The welcome given to the Delegates of the Conference at this year's meeting made everyone feel so much at home that all were happy to think of S. Giuseppe in Assisi as a centre where meetings for Benedictine Women can be prepared. Many thanks to M.Giacinta for this offer.



DOCUMENTATION

The new text of Nrs 7,8, and 9 of the Lex Propria suggested by Abbot President Richard Yeo and voted on by the Congress.

(referred to in the article on page 1)

Caput III

De collaboratione inter mulieres O.S.B.

7. Quo melius inter monasteria, Foederationes atque Instituta mulierum O.S.B. foveatur collaboratio fraterna, constituitur in gremio Confoederationis Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum, quae regitur statutis propriis, ab Abbate Primate confirmatis.

8. Monasteria, Foederationes atque Instituta mulierum O.S.B. quae cum Confoederatione consociantur ipso iure Communioni Internationali Benedictinarum adscribuntur.

9. Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum consilium pro oportunitate dat Abbati Primati de negotiis ad mulieres O.S.B. spectantibus.



Report of the Moderator to the Abbots' Congress September 2004 in S. Anselmo

Dear Reverend Fr. Abbot Primate, Abbots President, Fr. Abbots, dear Brothers and Sisters,

Introduction

On behalf of all the members of the Conference of the CIB who have been present at this meeting, I would like to express our warm appreciation for Abbot Primate's invitation to us and for the spirit of fraternity in Christ in which all of you have welcomed us into your circle during these days. They are privileged days for us in countless ways, and we are deeply grateful. Thank you too for the interest you show in the CIB. As the Moderator, it is my task to present a report on significant developments since the Congress of 2000.

What is the CIB?

Many of you are new to the Abbots' Congress and probably not acquainted with the CIB. For your benefit, allow me to introduce us. During the 1970s, the then Abbot Primate Rembert Weakland, together with a group of nuns and sisters whom he had invited to collaborate in the preparation of the new CIC, recognised

the need for change in the status of nuns and sisters in the Confoederatio Benedictina. The Confederation had been founded in 1893 as an association of Congregations of men's monasteries living according to the Rule of St. Benedict. Women's congregations and monasteries, in order to be recognised by the Holy See as Benedictine, had to be associated in some way with the Confederation, but they could not be members. For 80 years this had apparently not troubled anyone too much. But we were now, in the second half of the 20th century, in a society in which developing democracy world wide was recognising that women had the same rights as men. Catholic women were being challenged to examine their own status as women in society, in professional life, in the family, and in the Church. I think you will understand, without my going into detail, that from about 1974 onwards it was becoming increasingly an acute embarrassment for Benedictine women, when asked by other women or men about the Order they belonged to, to have to answer that the Benedictine existence of their own congregation or monastery depended on aggregation to a men's congregation, of which however they could not be members.

The commission of nuns and the commission of sisters, originally founded by Abbot Primate Rembert Weakland to advise him in connection with the new Codex, received a new mandate after the work on the Codex was completed. Abbot Primate Viktor Dammertz fused the two commissions into one in 1987, and restructured the membership so that it represented 18 (later 19) language regions. Its task was, in collaboration with the Abbot Primate, to seek a structure and a status for the women's communities living according to the Rule of St. Benedict that would express in the Church and project into society in a more satisfactory way than heretofore, the equality of man and woman in their complementary existence as Image of God and as members of the Body of Christ.

Encouraged by the following Abbots Primate Jerome Theissen, Marcel Rooney and Notker Wolf, the Commission built up a network among the women's communities in the 19 regions.

Each region elects a delegate, who attends the annual meeting, and a substitute who may attend. From 1996 on there has been a permanent secretary for the Commission. In 1998 the Conference elected a Moderator and an Administrative Council for 4 years. Meanwhile, with the help of Abbot Richard Yeo, the group was working out Statutes.

At the meeting of the Conference that took place before the Abbots' Congress 2000, we set ourselves the goal of finalising work on the Statutes with a view to presenting them formally to the Congress in 2004. This formal presentation would lead in to a request to the Congress to update the references in the Lex Propria to the relations between the women's' communities and the Confederation, bringing that document into line with the changes that had taken place since the Lex Propria appeared in 1983.

Developments up to 2004

At the 2001 meeting of the Commission in Nairobi, the name *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* was voted for the body of Benedictine women all over the world consociated with the Confederation. (*Consociatio* was the new word used in the Lex Propria of 1983 for the relationship between the women's congregations/communities and the Confederation). The name of the Commission was altered to „*Conference of the CIB*“. The Statutes were approved by Abbot Primate in September 2002.

A year later, in September 2003, the CIB requested the Abbot Primate to present to the Synod of Presidents for their preliminary approval a draft of their request for alterations in the Lex Propria. After the break to-day, Abbot President Richard will be presenting our request to the Congress and asking for your vote.

As well as working to clarify the relationship of the new world-wide Communio of Benedictine nuns and sisters to the Confederation, we have made significant progress during the past four years.

1. The Finance Committee that was given its mandate from the Administrative Council in 2003 has been operating effectively. The Conference of the CIB meets each year, the Administrative Council twice a year. The task of the Finance Committee is to administer the funds of the Conference, to raise money to cover travel and other costs of those who cannot pay for themselves to attend meetings or the Symposia (this we call the Solidarity Fund), and to cover the running costs of the organisation. The Regions pay an annual contribution as far as they are able. The Treasurer solicits donations over and above these contributions.
2. The preliminary clarifications necessary for acquiring a legal status for the CIB have progressed. We have established that it would be feasible for us to found an association from within the CIB, recognised in German law as a juridical person, legally capable of being a party to a contract, of acquiring property, of receiving donations, and of benefiting from the tax remissions allowed to associations with the status of a charity.
3. Having hoped to have in the near future an office in S. Anselmo which we could use as a secretariat, we have had to abandon the idea at least for the present due to the delays in the building programme here. M. Giacinta, the Conference delegate for Region 1, has very kindly offered us a room in her monastery of S. Giuseppe in Assisi which we can use at least for the time being.
4. The first aim of the CIB, as you can read in our Statute, is to „*promote mutual support and exchange of ideas and experience among Benedictine women on an international level and to foster the development of women's monasticism*“. We would want all Benedictine women's communities to be able to benefit from this mutual support and exchange. But a long process is necessary in order to build up the network of communication and support to the point where everyone can be involved, as

is the case e.g. in the Benedictine Confederation. To promote interest and awareness at grass-roots, we mostly hold our meetings in a different place each year. This gives us a chance to meet at least one whole community of a region, as well as many sisters from the area, who join us for part of the meeting. Since the last Congress we have held meetings like this in Nairobi, in Sydney, in Assisi. Our next meeting, in September 2005, will be in Poland. There we hope also to meet some of the Benedictine nuns of Lithuania and maybe even the Ukraine. These meetings are helping our sisters to understand the aims of the CIB, to profit from what is happening for the benefit of their own monastic lives in their own region, and to be encouraged to find ways of participating.

5. Plans for the Symposium 2006 are under way. Our main theme will be „*Benedictine Leadership in our time*“.
6. A few months ago we opened a web-site under the address: www.benedictines-cib.com

How do we see the significance of the CIB for the future?

When Abbot Primate mentioned the CIB at the beginning of this Congress, he remarked that we are not aiming to become a juridical entity within the canonical structures of consecrated life. We are aiming more, he said, at promoting women's monastic life at a spiritual and fraternal level.

This is true. The CIB embraces communities of nuns and communities of sisters, each unique in its history and its particular form of the monastic charism. The use of the name „*Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*“ does not in any way affect the already existing juridical structures in which a particular community exists. As we grow in respect and appreciation of the different specific values of the different forms of Benedictine life, we are also becoming more deeply aware of what constitutes that contemplative-monastic foundation that we all have in common. We hope that the CIB will be a help to all our communities, those of the traditional cloistered form and those of the so-called apostolic form, to be putting our roots down further into the deep contemplative earth of monastic prayer and monastic communion, and to be passing on through our prayer and our lives to all those we call our monastic guests, a world-view and a way of living centred wholly on Jesus Christ.

As Benedictines, we know that spirituality is not simply a matter of meditation and prayer, spiritual reading, study and a way of personal sanctification. Building up a community, a *Domus Dei*, House of God, as the Rule of St. Benedict shows us, with its demanding community life and hospitality, involves developing all our skills of human communication and organisation, and, within the reality of the social ambient of the monastery, finding ways of earning our living that allow us to lead a life of deep prayer and of fraternal community. The very nature of the CIB and its way of working will be communicating this message of Benedictine spirituality for our time to all who become involved.

Now that we have built up a functioning organisation, our meetings will have more space for preparing other spiritual aspects than we have often had up to now. We are not planning to seek a new juridical status. But this does not preclude the possibility that a time may come when the members of the CIB will question whether *consociatio* as it is understood by canon law at the present time, is in the long term the most appropriate form of relationship between the monks of the Benedictine Confederation and their sisters. But this is not a question for the immediate future

You may have read a letter written and published last May by Cardinal Ratzinger and approved by the Holy Father, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world. You see how this question continues to occupy even Cardinal Ratzinger. It certainly continues to occupy very many women and many men too. The letter attempts to formulate a theology and an anthropology of sexuality that is rooted in profound meditation of the Sacred Scriptures. As such it speaks to the heart of anyone following the path of *lectio divina*, and is a document for all monks and nuns. But I did not find any help in it for dealing with the concrete questions I live with about being a woman in the Church at the present time. For help on this level I look elsewhere. What helps me, are those areas where my life and that of my community as Benedictine nuns, and the lives of our brothers converge positively and fruitfully with each other for Life in the Spirit. At this level there is already, thank God, a great deal of collaboration between the men and the women of the Benedictine order. At the level of the Confederation as a whole and the CIB as a whole, new areas for collaboration of this kind could open up in the future, encouraging us to grow in faith and love.

During these days we have listened together to rich presentations on the subject of globalisation. A few months ago I was present at another meeting where this theme was dealt with. It was the meeting of the superiors of the German women's communities. The speaker too was a woman, a Catholic professor of Sociology from the university of Vienna. There was a lot of similarity in the presentations, but there was one big difference. When women study globalisation and think and talk about it, one of their most urgent concerns is the consequences of this economic and social phenomenon for women and children. The Austrian lady professor spoke with impressive objectivity about the disturbingly dramatic rise world-wide in sex-tourism and child prostitution, and about a horribly organised world trade based on the exploitation of young women and sex that globalisation is bringing in its wake. She was presenting this not one-sidedly just as violence and injustice against women and children, but as a tragic corruption of the souls both of men and women that is threatening to destroy the ethical fabric of our civilisation. A woman lecturing on globalisation to women in consecrated life would never think that these matters are unsuitable for nuns and sisters. Our presenter knew intuitively, that our consecrated life, just like her own life in Christian marriage, is a spiritual response to these evil manifestations, and she spoke to us in a way leading us deeper into our vocation and its meaning in the world we live in.

Sharing our different viewpoints as women and as men towards a matter like this would be an example of fruitful collaboration that we could practice. The effectiveness of our lives, united through our baptism to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can receive valuable nourishment by our consciousness of being united in this spiritual warfare to which we are called today, and by the support and encouragement that we give each other.

Conclusion

Thank you for listening. Thank you too, Abbot Primate, Abbot President Richard and many others of you who have helped and encouraged us in different ways. I would ask you respectfully to listen with good-will towards us to Abbot Richard's presentation after the break, sharing our hope for the future of Benedictine monasticism in the Church in our time.

A community that is in good shape
is not first of all a community which has many young vocations;
it is first of all a community
where there is
mutual forgiveness.

(quoted by M.Henriette Wendbala Kalmogo)



Extracts from the UISG/USG Preparatory Paper for the Congress on Consecrated Life

The whole document can be found in different languages on the website of the UISG

Objectives of the Congress

The overall objective of the Congress is to discern together, with global awareness, what the Spirit of God is bringing about among us, where the Spirit is leading us, and how we can respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7)

This objective is composed of the following particular objectives

- · *to discover and discern the validity of the new that is appearing among us;*
- · *to accept and promote this newness as a gift from God and an expression of commitment;*
- · *..... to foster communion and solidarity among the men and women of consecrated life;*

..... we deeply desire to express the "spirit" of the Congress which inspires all its particular "components" in the following verbs or dynamic attitudes that have inspired us in the writing of this document: welcoming, transforming, beginning anew, celebrating.

- · *Welcoming implies seeing, discovering, listening to what the Spirit offers and perceiving how the Gospel moves us to respond.*
- · *Transforming implies openness to learning and discerning the spirits that move us.*
- · *Beginning anew suggests a willingness to be decisive and to make proposals that help transform..... and re-think our concrete actions. Such proposals require both personal and communal conversion.....*
- · *Celebrating evokes an authentically celebrative attitude which is needed throughout the Congress. This demands an ability to create symbols, to contemplate, to be joyful, to ask pardon, to intercede, to give thanks and to praise.....*

Part Three:

I. Indications of newness: where is the Spirit leading us?

77. *The Holy Spirit continues to act in the world, the Church, and in us. Signs of hope and life appear everywhere. Those who are sensitive to the Spirit and the Truth "know the gift of God" (Jn 4:10) and also know what should be done to live and give life. There are signs of all this in consecrated life that we should be able to read and interpret. Above all, we have to know how to enter into the process so as to bring to fruition what is now beginning....*

II. The meetings that transform: we have gone to drink from the same well.

82. Among the most significant and important encounters and among those with greater consequences for consecrated life, we need to note the following: encounters between men and women and between religious and laity. Through these encounters we are slowly learning to drink from the same well and to walk through the life of the Church and of society with both feet, listening with our two ears and seeing with our two eyes.....We are trying to break many kinds of barriers and divisions and to build bridges and to create communion. We are also discovering the richness of the different forms of religious life in the different traditions, through dialogue with them and interchange.....

83. These encounters ... are revealing the lines of development of the indispensable dimensions of the new in consecrated life. They are already becoming a reality but need the creativity and insight of many in order to take shape in the present situation of Church and society..... new forms of evangelical life are emerging, which are simple, radical, ecumenical, inserted among the people, flexible in structure, welcoming, attentive to symbolic language, attentive to the present rhythms of life, and attentive to the demands of deep communion with God and with people. (VC 12, 62).



Structures of the CIB

1. Administrative Council

The main task of the Council is to prepare meetings and to promote the aims of the CIB as described in the Statutes.

Moderator	Abbess Máire Hickey
Assistant Moderator	Prioress Judith Ann Heble
Other members of the Council	Rev. Mother Abbess Jolanta Rzoska Prioress General Sonia Wagner Rev. Mother Prioress General Theodora Ntuli

2. CIB Conference of Delegates

There is an annual meeting of the Conference. If a Delegate cannot come to a meeting, she is represented by her substitute.

Region 01 Conference Delegate - Rev. Abbadessa Giacinta Soverino
 Region 01 Substitute - Rev. Abbadessa Michaela Porcellato
 Region 02 Conference Delegate - Rev. da Abadesa Concepción Fanjul Camporro
 Region 02 Substitute - Rev. da Abadesa Maria Jesús Sáez de Vicuna
 Region 03 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mère Prieure Générale Véronique Dussud
 Region 03 Substitute
 Region 04 Conference Delegate - Lady Abbess Joanna Jamieson
 Region 04 Substitute - Rev. Mother Prioress Zoe Davis
 Region 05 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mère Prieure Erica Van de Caeter
 Region 05 Substitute
 Region 06 Conference Delegate - Frau Priorin Lucia Wagner
 Region 06 Substitute/Treasurer - Frau Priorin Johanna Domek
 Region 07 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Abbess Jolanta Rzoska
 Region 07 Substitute - Mother Prioress General Martyna Wysocka
 Region 08 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mère Abbess Anastazija Cizmin
 Region 08 Substitute - Rev. Mère Abbess Ivana Seravic
 Region 09 Conference Delegate - Prioress Judith Ann Heble
 Region 09 Conference Delegate - Sister Esther Fangman
 Region 09 Conference Delegate - Mère Abbess Isabelle Thouin
 Region 09 Substitute - Sister Kathryn Huber
 Region 09 2nd Substitute - Prioress Cecilia Dwyer
 Region 10 Conference Delegate - Hna Josephine Markiewicz
 Region 10 Substitute - Rev. ma Abadesa María Isabel Federik
 Region 11 Conference Delegate - Rev. ma Abadesa Vera Lucia Parreiras Horta
 Region 11 Substitute - Rev. ma Abadesa Martha Lúcia Ribeiro Teixeira
 Region 12 Conference Delegate - Rev. da Abadesa María Teresa Ferrari
 Region 12 Substitute - Rev. da Prioress M. Estella María Armelín
 Region 13, Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Prioress Dolores Hong,
 Region 13 Substitute -
 Region 14, Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Prioress General Miriam Alejandrino
 Region 14 Substitute - Rev. Mother Abbess Celeste Nidea,
 Region 15 Conference Delegate - Prioress General Sonia Wagner
 Region 15 Substitute - Rev. Mother Prioress Joan Moloney
 Region 16 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Prioress General Inviolata Anton Omari
 Region 16 Substitute - Rev. Mother Prioress General Shukrani Mkonde
 Region 17 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mère Abbess Henriette Wendbala Kalmogo

Region 17 Substitute - Rev. Mère Prieure Gabriele Ravaosolo
Region 18, Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Prioress General Theodora Ntuli
Region 18 Substitute - Rev. Mother Prioress General Irmgard K. Poroto
Region 19 Conference Delegate - Rev. Mother Prioress Stella Vararapilly
Region 19 Substiute - Rev. Mother Prioress Sylvester Jayakody
co-opted Conference Delegate - Prioress General Irene Dabalus
co-opted Substitute - Mother Prioress General Teresa Paula Dias Perdigao
AIM Observer - Schwester Gisela Happ