

**September 10<sup>th</sup> 2018     M. Theodora Ntuli**

It gives me great pleasure, M. Theodora, to introduce you to those present who are meeting you for the first time at this Symposium.

M. Theodora belongs to the Benedictine Sisters of Twasana in Vryheid, Kwa-Zulu in the Diocese of Eshowe, Natal. The Congregation was founded by the German Bishop Thomas Spreiter OSB (St. Ottilien/Inkamana,) of Eshowe, and canonically erected in 1947 as a diocesan Congregation.

The Congregation has over 50 sisters in 10 priories. They run a day and boarding school for boys and girls, and a care centre (Bl. Gerard's Care Centre) for local people. They are based in isolated Zulu territory, where it is difficult to encourage new vocations.

M. Theodora has spent altogether 24 years in leadership in her community. During that time she came to Rome for the first time. I think it was for the Colloquium in 2000 or the 4<sup>th</sup> Symposium in 2002.

Coming to Rome meant for M. Theodora, as it has done for all of us, a great new broadening of one's horizons – horizons of one's own life, of one's community, of Benedictine life. M. Theodora attended not just CIB meetings, where she served as the delegate for South Africa for a number of years, and also as a member of Sr. Judith Ann's Administrative Council; she also attended the Monastic Formators' Programme for 3 months in its early stages. Afterwards, she did not withdraw back into her own community to benefit from the privileges she had enjoyed. She recognised the vision, the values and the commitment of the CIB, and appreciated it for what it can contribute to a vibrant global women's monastic spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So it is no surprise that she has devoted herself since then, over and above the care for her own community, to projects that would broaden the horizons of her African sisters. She has contributed significantly with, her deep African faith, her Benedictine wisdom, and her energy to the development of BECOSA, the association that brings the 9 communities of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe together in regular meetings for sharing and mutual support.

More recently she has been significantly involved in the creation of the Association of St. Mechtildis. This association originated in the wish of some African Prioresses to become members of the Federation of St. Scholastica, after they had discovered, directly and indirectly through the relationships that have grown out of CIB meetings and visits, the great advantages for monastic life today of a strong union of monasteries, rather than separate isolated communities, struggling for survival with their limited resources. However, given the long distances between Africa and the United States, the sisters were encouraged to form their own federation of African monasteries. M. Theodora is at present the Moderator of the Association of St. Mechtildis, consisting of the communities of Twasana, Oshikuku (Sth. Africa) and , Chipole, Imiliwaha and Mary Help of Christians (Tanzania). You can read M. Theodora's report on the Chapter of 2015 on the CIB website. I have to say that when I read it, I felt great joy in recognising how this new group of African Benedictine Sisters bears clear marks of a strong CIB education, which augurs well, with God's help, for the future of our Order.

Today, M. Theodora is going to share with us her experiences and insights in the realm of monastic hospitality to those outside the monastery.