



Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

www.benedictines-cib.org

Newsletter September, 2009, Issue 5

Editorial

Sr. Mary Rardin

CIB Secretary

This CIB Newsletter is about the recent CIB Conference September 3-13 which took place in Zadar, Croatia and was generously hosted by M. Anastazija Čizmin and her monastery of St. Mary (Samostan Sveta Marije), along with all the Benedictines of Region 8. In this Newsletter are summaries of some presentations by Croatian Benedictines, information about some of the work done during the Conference, preliminary information about the 2010 CIB Symposium that is in Rome next September, and reflections from some of those who attended the CIB Conference for the first time.

Presentations were given by Prior Jozo Milanović from Čokovac and Sr. Benedicta Halilović from Pag, Croatia on the profile of the Church and Benedictine life in Croatia. The attendees found the Croatian Benedictines and people to be real models of hope.

This is the first Newsletter since September, 2007. There was no Newsletter done last year when the CIB Conference was in Rome because the secretary's position was in transition. Last year at this time, Sr. Monica Lewis was trying to finish her many years of exceptional service as the CIB Secretary and last November I was asked to take her place, which has been a challenge! So, with God's grace, I am attempting to carry on her excellent work. ✠



The Monastery and Church of Svete Marija in Zadar, Croatia

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From the CIB Moderator

Sr. Judith Ann Heble

Mother Anastazija and her community certainly provided the CIB Delegates a wonderful opportunity to experience many aspects of the beautiful country of Croatia. It was a special grace to join the Sisters in Zadar in their beautiful prayer life and meals. I was particularly honored to celebrate the 50th anniversary of my entrance into Benedictine life on September 8, a solemnity in Croatia! The special liturgy provided me an experience that I will never forget, especially as each anniversary comes around.

I was also pleased with the active participation of the Delegates in the business meetings of the CIB. Born in 2001, the CIB found it necessary to update its Statutes to reflect its growth and maturing over the last 8 years. On September 4, 2009, the Delegates unanimously approved the revisions to the Statutes and the Abbot Primate willingly ratified them. A wonderful sisterly bond is deepening among the CIB Delegates as we support one another in exchanging ideas, hopes and dreams for our own communities and Regions. ✠

"More important than the work was the opportunity to meet so many leaders of Benedictine monasteries from various continents and the many spontaneous interactions. "

M. Angela Strobel

My First Experience of a CIB Meeting

M. Angela Strobel

Prioress General, Missionary Benedictines of Tutzing

The first sight, although it captures only a moment or a little piece of the reality, always is a special revelation like a door that opens to unknown scenery. The CIB conference in Croatia opened this door for me. I had accompanied the development and activities of the CIB through Bulletins, Newsletters and information and, for some time, especially through what I learned from our former Superior General M. Irene Dabalus. Now, after being a co-opted delegate for already three years, I was able for the first time to take part in a CIB conference, the one which took place in the Monastery Svete Marija in Zadar, Croatia, from September 3-13, 2009.

CIB and Zadar, what a rich combination! It offered valuable insights and a unique experience of Benedictine life in Croatia and all over the world.

What struck me regarding the CIB Meeting was seeing the organization in 19 regions with their respective Delegates and Substitutes, meaning that a great part of the Benedictine monasteries of women in the world belong to this international association. Year by year concrete steps had been done implementing the four CIB goals for 2006-2010, most exciting being the **question whether we, as Benedictine Women have a word for the world.**

The good organization and work of the CIB, the Administrative Council and the Conference was obvious and showed itself also in the preparation of this Meeting and during the sessions. For example, the Statutes whose proposed changes had been worked on before thoroughly could be promptly

approved. The moderator, Sr. Judith Ann Heble, conducted the conference firmly and calmly. Besides the ability of the moderator, I suppose its success was due to the Benedictine way of doing things, having *Lectio Divina* at every start.



More important than the work was the opportunity to meet so many leaders of Benedictine monasteries from various continents and the many spontaneous interactions. The Benedictine Monasteries were no more only spots on the map but drew near and concrete.

This became especially true through the visits to some monasteries in Croatia, the information and personal contacts. Everywhere we were received with joyful hospitality, we celebrated together the Eucharist, the meals, the sightseeing of the wonderful Croatian country.

What made the stay in Croatia especially enjoyable was the community of Sv. Marija in Zadar, our host. How welcomed we felt every time when the parlor door opened for us, how simple and communicative the Sisters were and I am happy to have learned all their names. To each and everyone, especially to M. Abbess Anastazija, gratitude; I keep a pleasant remembrance.

The millenary history of the monasteries in Croatia is most interesting and touching. Endurance and perseverance are some of their characteristics. Indeed we met and experienced what is the next Symposium's theme: **Benedictine Women, Witnesses of Hope.** ✠



*Mother Anastazija (middle, back row)
and most of the host community in
Zadar*

Nachdenken der kroatischen Sitzung

M. Franziska Lukas, Dinklage, Germany

Kroatien – ein Land, das eigentlich Gott für sich selber erschaffen hatte. So erzählt es die Legende und so ist klar, wie herrlich dieser Teil der Erde ist!

M. Anastazija Čizmin und die Gemeinschaft in Zadar hatten uns, die Conference der CIB Delegierten, aufs herzlichste empfangen und einen Aufenthalt bereitet, der uns von Stunde zu Stunde mehr staunen ließ. Es war die Schönheit des Landes in seiner ganzen Vielfalt, es war die Kultur, die die Menschen dort über alle Zeiten von Besetzungen durch andere Mächte und Kriege erhalten haben, es war das benediktinische Leben, welches inmitten der Kirche einen festen Platz hat. Ja, mehr als das: die Präsenz der Benediktinerinnen war für Kroatien über die Grenze der Kirche hinaus wie eine feststehende Wehr und Ermutigung in all den Jahren der Not und des Schreckens durch Fremdbesetzung und Krieg. Auf diesem Hintergrund war es nicht verblüffend, dass die Medien der Kirche mit großem Interesse von unserer Zusammenkunft berichteten und so konnten die Menschen davon erfahren. Dass sie es lasen, war ganz offensichtlich, denn oft wurden wir auf der Straße (und das nicht nur in Zadar selber) angesprochen. Mit offenen Ohren hörten die Menschen, woher wir kamen und warum wir zusammen gekommen waren. Aber es waren nicht nur die Leute des Landes, die uns wahrnahmen. Die kroatischen Benediktinerinnen, auf 7 verschiedenen kleinen Inseln dem Land vorgelagert lebend, und die Mitbrüder eines einzigen Benediktinerklosters im Land, freuten sich viel Zeit mit der internationalen Gruppe benediktinischer Mitschwestern zu verbringen.

Bei soviel Willkommen war es ein Leichtes auch in den Arbeitsrhythmus der Conference einzutauchen. Letzte Eingaben für die Statuten mussten bedacht und abgestimmt und das kommende Symposium 2010 in Rom weiter vorbereitet werden. Für die lebendige Vernetzung der Benediktinerinnen in aller Welt war es wichtig aus den einzelnen Regionen die Entwicklungen, die Freuden und die Kümernisse zu hören, um das gegenseitige Verständnis zu stärken und zugleich einander im Gebet Ermutigung und Unterstützung zu geben. All das erfüllt mich mit großer Dankbarkeit, durfte ich doch als „Vertretung der Vertretung der Region 6“ - dazu gehören die deutschsprachigen Länder und Skandinavien - an diesem Treffen teilnehmen. Überall auf der Welt sind wir Benediktinerinnen im Gotteslob verbunden. In dem Land, das Gott für sich selber erschaffen hatte, hat es eine eigene Strahlkraft! ✠

Reflections of the Croatian Meeting

Croatia – a country God created for himself. So says the legend, and it is so clear how magnificent this part of the world is!



M. Anastazija Čizmin and the community in Zadar warmly welcomed us and arranged a stay for us that made us more amazed from hour to hour. It was the beauty of the country in all its variety – it was the culture which people have preserved through years of war and foreign domination; it was the Benedictine life which has held a steadfast position within the church. Yes, even more than that, beyond the usual boundaries of the church, the presence of the Benedictine nuns was like a steady sense of protection and encouragement for Croatia through all the years of hardship and terror from foreign powers and wars.

With this background, it was not amazing that the Church media reported with such great interest on our meeting so people could know about it. The fact that they read about it was obvious, as we were often approached about it on the streets, and not just in Zadar itself. With open ears the people heard about where we came from and why we came together. But it was not only the people of the country who received us. The Benedictine nuns, living on seven different small islands along the coast, and the monks from the only Benedictine abbey in the country, were also pleased to spend much time with our international group of Benedictine women.

With so much hospitality, it was easy to immerse ourselves into the Conference's rhythm of work. The last revisions for the statutes had to be considered and voted upon and the upcoming 2010 Symposium in Rome further prepared. For an active networking of Benedictine women all over the world, it was important to hear the developments, and the joys and sorrows, from the various regions in order to strengthen mutual understanding and also give each other encouragement and support in prayer.

All this fills me with great gratitude, that I was allowed to participate in this meeting as a “representative for the representative” of Region 6, which includes the German-speaking countries and Scandinavia. Throughout the world we Benedictine women are united in praise of God. This country that God has created for himself really has its own charisma! ✠



The Church in Croatia

Prior Jozo Milanović

(Summary by Sr. Mary Rardin)

“Croatia was the home to a lot of hermits as early as the first centuries after Christ, especially across the Adriatic islands, and it became the home of a community of cenobitic monks in the 4th century. The best-known monk from these regions must be St. Jerome...born in Dalmatia.”

“Monastic life in Croatia appeared along with the arrival of Christianity. The Benedictines were the first to arrive and were active along the Croatian coast and on the islands during the reign of the Croatian national princes and kings.”

“People today have a big spiritual hunger and thirst for God. We need to recognize this hunger and respond directly to it, as a top priority.”

Sr. Benedicta

By the 11th century there were about 50 Benedictine monasteries. Starting in the 12th century, the Croats were divided into various states under the rule of other nations, such as Hungary, then Venice, Turkish rule, France (under Napoleon) and finally Austria. Yugoslavia was established after WWI with discrimination against the

Croatian people and the Catholic Church. After WWII it became worse with the Yugoslav communist regime severely restricting the Church and its people.

When the Republic of Croatia was created in 1991, the Church finally regained its freedom, legal position, the ability to establish its own schools and even to provide catechesis in the public schools if desired. Out of a total population of about 4.5 million in Croatia, about 88% identify themselves as Catholic, 4.4 % as Orthodox, and 1.3% Muslim. . “Croatia saw a change, similar to the one taking place in the 4th century, following the Edict of Milan: the number of church attendants went up dramatically....but the expected growth in more consistent Christian living has failed to accompany it.”

Currently in Croatia, there is one Benedictine monastery of six monks and eight monasteries of nuns. ✕

Benedictine Nuns in the Region of Croatia

Sr. Benedicta Halilovic

President, Federation of Croatian Benedictine Women

(Summary by Sr. Mary Rardin)



Benedictine female monasteries in the region of Croatia date from the 11th century, including the Zadar and Trogir communities which still exist. The first girls' schools were linked with Benedictine nuns.

There were about a hundred nuns and 17 monasteries prior to the Napoleonic wars, but many were abolished by the Austrians and then the French. Nine Benedictine monasteries were spared to allow for running girls' schools in nine different towns. Of these, eight still exist with a total of about 80 nuns.

After WWII the Communist regime reduced any work or contact with people on the outside by religious to a minimum and even restricted interaction between monasteries. It was hard work just barely surviving. As a result of this isolation, the communities missed out on much of the ideas and changes of Vatican II.

During the last century's wars, the nuns helped the people by running kindergartens, schools and orphanages during WWII and during the war about 20 years ago, the communities provided food, shelter, clothing and medicine for the refugees.

“Today our communities are predominantly elderly, with a small number of nuns and few new vocations. ...There's a big generation gap. It's hard to attract young people if the youngest in your community is 45 or 50.”

Other challenges facing the Croatian communities:

- The necessity of moving away from self-isolation to more interaction, sharing ideas and talent.
- Welcoming guests and sharing our inner prayer lives with those who come to us seeking God.
- Developing a vision for the future likely different from 50 years ago and involving new works.

“People today have a big spiritual hunger and thirst for God. We need to recognize this hunger and respond directly to it, as a top priority.” ✕

The complete texts of Prior Jozo and Sister Benedicta are on the CIB website: www.benedictines-cib.org

An Honor For Us!

Mother M. Anastazija Čizmin



...We wanted, we truly wanted you to enjoy our beautiful homeland. God gave us the marvelous land and sea, with faith and culture, with heritage and tradition. And the lovely weather! That is what we wanted to show you and that is why we needed quite a few days and excursions and a lot of effort but, of course, it was all flavored with great love, joy, song and humor, was it not? Those were days of new insights in the meetings with you, in re-visiting and traveling throughout our beautiful homeland for us as well.

Imagine what kind of honor it was for us, for all the Benedictine nuns, for our church in Zadar and for our people, to be able to see and to experience a nice number of Benedictine nuns from all over the world on our streets..... Many said that they were happy to be able to meet you and had experienced your stay as a blessing.

Our song is wonderful, and our Dalmatian singing groups are harmonious and trained. We provided you the smell and the taste of our sea food and of the simple Dalmatian dishes. We needed two more weeks to visit each of our monasteries, those beautiful pearls on the Adriatic islands. But, during your visit to the northern (Pag) and southern part of our coast (Šibenik), you have felt and seen all the monasteries. ✕

Impressions of a Zadar Postulant

Marija Bešker

It is very difficult to put on paper all that can be said about the great meeting of the Benedictine representatives from all over the world. Preparations started long before this important meeting. There was some anxiety because never before had there been such a meeting in our country, and we did not have any experience in such big meetings. Regardless of

all, it turned out very well, actually excellent.

Everywhere, wherever they went, the CIB representatives were welcomed, particularly in Mother Anastasia's birthplace, where they saw the original costumes, dances and songs of the area, baskets with lovely grapes, a variety of national cakes; it was all a pleasant and nice surprise for them.

The departure from the monastery in Zadar and from our country was very touching. Mother Anastasia

gave everyone nice presents as souvenirs, and they were given by the sisters dressed in national costumes, which particularly delighted the representatives. This all went on during our lunch together, and the delight and joy were great and mutual....We did not then feel that they were guests and we were hosts but as all Benedictines unanimous in laughter and happiness, as well as in prayer and work. ✕

Young European Sisters Meeting

June 14 - 18, 2010

Monastère Notre-Dame,
Ermeton, Belgium

Theme: Obedience

Speaker: M. Máire Hickey, O.S.B.

For information contact:

M. Zoë Davis

(Email: sisterzoe@turveyabbey.org.uk)



The Participants of the 2009 CIB Conference in Zadar, Croatia

News from the 2009 CIB Conference

The **annual meeting of the CIB Conference** took place September 4-9 in **Zadar, Croatia** hosted by the community of M. Anastazija Čizmin and the other Benedictine monasteries of Region 8. Presentations were given by Prior Jozo Milanović from Čokovac and Sr. Benedicta Halilović from Pag on the profile of the Church and Benedictine life in Croatia. The CIB attendees found the Croatian Benedictines and people to be real models of hope. They have endured two wars in the past 70 years, along with the Communist regime, and have emerged to rebuild their monasteries and become their own nation.

Statutes: During the Conference the delegates reviewed, made a few modifications and then gave final approval for the proposed revisions to the CIB Statutes. The new Statutes were then ratified by Abbot Primate Notker Wolf. The new Statutes may be found on the CIB website.

Finances: The proposed 2010 budget shows that expenses will exceed the projected income due to the costs with the upcoming 2010 Symposium. Regions are strongly urged to pay their yearly contribution for the Solidarity fund by **July 1** in order to help with the Symposium expenses. Regions should pay whatever they can if they are unable to give the entire amount.

Solidarity Fund Information: This fund is used only for the activity and operation of the CIB. About half of the fund is used to help members from some regions be able to attend the meetings. There is no money available for donations or contributions for other causes. Currently, further funding will be needed to pay all the expenses for the 2010 Symposium.

2011 CIB Conference: Mère Henriette Kalmogo from Burkina Faso invited the CIB to West Africa for the 2011 CIB Conference meeting. It will be held in Togo, West Africa sometime in September, 2011.



M. Anastazija passing CIB candle to M. Gian Paola for the 2010 Symposium

Timetable for the 2010 Symposium:

February, 2010: Mailing of information, registration form, Solidarity fund application and Region Information paper.

June 1, 2010: **Due Date for everything** - all registration forms, Solidarity fund requests, Visa letter requests, Region template papers and region photos (or videos). Everything must be sent to **Sr. Mary Rardin**.

CIB Website: www.benedictines-cib.org

The new website is now up with most of the English language site, as well as information about the 2009 Croatia Conference. The next step is to develop the sections for the other languages. Any photographs, information, or materials that Regions think may be helpful for the website is very much appreciated and should be sent to Sr. Mary Rardin (email: mrardin@gmail.com).

CERL (CIB Electronic Reference Library): Sr. Marie-Benoît, with help from Sr. Monica, is starting to develop and organize a catalogue of interesting Benedictine websites which will eventually be available on the CIB website.

CIB Secretariat: All the CIB materials will be moved from Assisi to the Sant'Antonio monastery in Rome prior to the 2010 Symposium in September. ✕

CIB Symposium 2010

Benedictine Women: Witnesses of Hope Sant'Anselmo, Rome

Important Dates:

Sept 1-4:	Arrival of staff and planning team
Sept 5-7:	Arrival of participants
Sept 6:	Administrative Council meeting
Sept 7:	Conference meeting
Sept 8-15:	Symposium
Sept 16:	Conference meeting and elections
Sept 16:	New Administrative Council meeting

Keynote Speakers:

Sister Maricarmen Bracomontes, OSB (Mexico)
Mère Thérèse-Marie Dupagne, OSB (Belgium)

**All information and forms will be sent out
February, 2010**