



Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

www.benedictines-cib.org

Newsletter September, 2010, Issue 6

Editorial

Sister Mary Rardin
CIB Secretary

With this CIB Newsletter, we bring you some of the richness and excitement of the 2010 CIB Symposium, held at Sant'Anselmo in Rome, as well as news from the CIB Conference meeting that met just before and after the Symposium. The theme of this year's Symposium was: **Benedictine Women - Witnesses of Hope**. And the keynote speakers, Mère Thérèse-Marie Dupagne and Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes, were certainly full of passion and hope for the future of Benedictine life! The other speakers were Abbot Primate Notker Wolf and Sister Judith Heble, each of whom inspired hope in their reflections. There was also a panel presentation by four nuns who reflected on hope in their personal lives.

Most of these talks, as well as many photos and some of the visual presentations, can be found on the CIB website, at the web address given above. ☒

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Participants of the 2010 CIB Symposium at Sant'Anselmo, Rome



BENEDICTINE WOMEN - WITNESSES OF HOPE

6th International CIB Symposium, Rome

8 - 15 September, 2010

From the CIB Moderator

Sister Judith Ann Heble, OSB
CIB Moderator

Looking back on the Symposium, a highlight for me was the opportunity to meet all of you – many of you for the first time. There was something about the gathering of this particular group of Benedictine women that was very special. It seems to me that, from the very beginning of the Symposium, there was a wonderful connectedness among us and we truly enjoyed being together. Did you feel it, too? Since I've been home, I often find myself humming or singing the antiphon: *Bonum est confidere in Domino, bonum sperare in Dominum.*

When we began the planning for the Symposium some three years ago, I could never have imagined how well it all would have worked out. I believe that the Holy Spirit was working over-time to bring it all together in a coherent, yet challenging manner. All of the pieces of the Symposium were carefully fitted together in one united reflection on and plea for HOPE.

My wish is that we keep hope alive in our hearts and express it with our lives to all we meet – especially in our own communities. I recommend that the Delegates take the time to review the happenings of the Symposium in your own Regions, utilizing the materials that you have received. Over the next four years, may we make a special effort to truly be **BENEDICTINE WOMEN: WITNESSES OF HOPE.** ☩

The New CIB Administrative Council!

On September 16, 2010, **Sister Judith Ann Heble**, Prioress of Sacred Heart Monastery in Lisle, IL USA, was unanimously re-elected as **CIB Moderator** for another four years. The Conference delegates were very grateful for her strong, organized leadership over the previous four years and are looking forward to her continued direction of the CIB as Moderator.

The other Administrative Council members elected by the Conference were:

Assistant Moderator:

Mère Thérèse-Marie Dupagne
Monastère Notre-Dame D'Hurtebise, Belgium

Council Member:

Prioress Sister Mary John Mananzan
St. Scholastica's Priory, Manila, Philippines

Council Member:

Prioress Sister Metilda George
Grace and Compassion Priory, Tamil Nadu, India

Later that same day, in accord with the Statutes, Sr. Judith Ann appointed two other **Council members**:

Mother Zoë Davis

Turvey Abbey, Great Britain

Prioress Sister M. Magdalena Shetunyenga
Benedictine Sisters of Oshikuku, Namibia



M. Thérèse-Marie and Srs. Mary John, Judith Ann and Metilda



Sr. M. Magdalena



M. Zoë

The Place of Hope in Benedictine Spirituality

Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes, OSB
Torreón, Mexico



(In a prophetic and challenging talk, Sr. Maricarmen spoke about situations that "cry for hope in our world, in the Church and in Religious Life" and reflected on elements of Benedictine spirituality that nourish and strengthen hope. In her talk, she also gave an excellent outline of the characteristics of emerging leadership in our communities that will help facilitate our responses

to today's challenges. Here are some excerpts from her presentation. Her entire talk is published on the CIB Website: www.benedictines-cib.org.)

"... the key to understanding my approach to hope from the perspective of Benedictine Spirituality is the conviction that the human person is a being called to unification, based on the experience of God's unconditional love. That experience invites us to enter into processes that lead to the integration of all the dimensions of our being. As a response to that integrating love, we gradually become able to "love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves" (RB 4, 1). Thus unified, monastics are called to unity among themselves, recognizing their diversity and equality. "

"To refer to the situations that clamor for hope in OUR WORLD is to become aware of all that dehumanizes, and that hinders a person's opportunities to become a better person. From a faith perspective this will include all those situations which impede our participation in the promise of Christ ...that prevent a person's healthy self-esteem, and a sense of having a reason for living. On the other hand they are related with all those things that prevent growth in a dignified, human way."

"Benedictine spirituality offers ways to face these challenges. Our charism is not marginal to the challenges and questions of our age. Benedict and Scholastica heard the cries of those who longed to build a world in which peace came as the fruit of justice in the recognition and respect of the dignity of each person. Those of us, who, by grace alone, have been called to participate in that same charism of the Divine Ruah, continue

to hear those cries in our times."

"I consider one of the major questions that we face in Religious Life in general is this: In the face of the present paradigm shift, are we really willing to move ahead with conviction to reconfigure our lives? We have a gift to offer: paths of personal and communal transformation which give witness to God's power: the love that makes all humans equal in the divine image and likeness. Our God, who has created us equal in dignity in the midst of our diversity, trusts us with the task of building that equality in history, by promoting inclusion and respect for our common home, the cosmos. In this way...we receive a call to work not only so that each member may find her place in the monastery and have the opportunity to use her gifts to reach fullness of life, but also that each sister may participate in the creation of life in abundance for others."

"...what has truly reinforced the ground of my hope has been to repeat like a mantra ..."Never lose hope in God's mercy" (RB 4,74). I think that hope grows in the small, daily, fragile, vulnerable places of our personal and community longings, when we refuse to resign ourselves to the status quo, when we won't just settle in and adapt even as life in all of its expressions is being undermined. I find hope in the ongoing passion of all of those people who are convinced that another world is possible and are willing to share their grain of sand, offering the gifts that they have been given."

"Our charism, our spirituality is very modest....Our hope is sustained in our confidence in divine mercy....But this simple and humble charism was capable of enormous social relevance at the beginning of the Middle Ages. At that time our form of community life became the great model of social organization for Europe at its very beginnings. Once again we are at a crossroads. History offers us two options. Will we live our Benedictine charism in all of its depth and offer it to the world today as our Benedictine ancestors did at the dawn of the Middle Ages? Or will we accommodate ourselves to outdated life forms and deny our world today the transforming power of our charism, as many of our communities did at the dawn of the Modern age?" ✠

Sr. Maricarmen Bracamontes is a member of Monasterio Pan de Vida in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico. She is on the Theological Reflection Team for the Mexican Conference of Major Superiors (CIRM), and is a theological advisor for the Latin American and Caribbean Conference of Religious Superiors (CLAR). She has written numerous articles, several books, and travels widely giving presentations to religious communities and major theological conferences.



Hope Against Hope and Living in Hope

**Mère Thérèse-Marie
Dupagne, OSB**

Saint-Hubert, Belgium

(Equally passionate and engaging with creative audio-visual effects, M. Thérèse-Marie spoke about the "modern plagues of Egypt" that test our hope, especially in the face of individualism, sectarianism, fanaticism, indifference, violence, death, and even facing our own sin. Through all this difficulty, though, she explains how we can still sing "Alleluia" in our nights. Her complete talks are on the CIB web-site.)

"If the question of hope is currently so important in our society, our Church and our communities, is it not because so many people in our *society* cruelly lack hope?"

"The average age of our communities continues to climb, and there are few vocations. Between the two editions of the Catalogus, we lost ¼ of our monastic population! ...Can we experience the decline of our communities as a Passover and Easter mystery? ...Remember, this isn't the first time in history that monasteries have disappeared from our region. Our country has many monastic ruins. ...But between reading a page of history and living it, there is a paschal abyss that only Christ, our hope, can help us cross. And it is noteworthy that in the past, monasteries often disappeared because of persecution. Today we are disappearing for lack of vocations. Indifference is more fatal to us than persecution."

"How can we sustain our hope in everyday life? ... Hope, for me, means *"putting one's hope in God"* (RB 4.41). As long as we anchor our hope elsewhere, we'll be terribly vulnerable. Hope in our achievements? Our plans? Our strengths? No! Our achievements, our plans, our strengths can light stars in our night, but they can't make the darkness go away."

"Putting one's hope in God" requires vigilance. When hope weakens, I know where to go to find the dysfunctions. If I don't regularly strengthen hope by living in His presence, by community and personal prayer, by lectio, it unravels and withers. It is in the depth of my relationship to God that my hope is quickened, even if it is night, even if this relationship is one of faith rather than vision, even if it demands a trusting abandon. It is a matter of "hoping against hope" (Rom 4:18)."

"On the day of my profession, as St. Benedict requires, I sang the *Suscipe*. This chant grounds my life on the promise of God, on his fidelity towards me. On that day, God did not commit himself to preserving me from death, he did not guarantee me a life without failure, he did not guarantee that I would be in my community, or in the Benedictine order (or disorder!) forever. This chant gave me over to the fidelity of God."

"We didn't commit ourselves to succeed, but just to live! To live in the movement of the Spirit of God which blows where it will, even in ruins, even in a pile of dry bones! We committed ourselves to letting God dream in us his craziest dreams, his dreams that became Body and Spirit in a nomadic people, a fragile communion of sinners. *"And hope does not deceive"* (Rom 5.5). In risking our whole lives on this faithful God, we committed ourselves with our whole will, with a hope that does not depend on us! This could appear to be a bit contradictory. But such a commitment, by consenting to death in advance, acquires a liberty, an undreamed-of creativity. We can risk our life like a dance step in a field of ruins! *Suscipe me...* receive me, O Lord...or pick me up, O Lord!"

"Becoming witnesses to the resurrection means to witness in the middle of the night, as it were. It is in the night of our world that monks must sing alleluia and proclaim their hope... Human nights do not necessarily lead to God...but God comes to us in the night, he comes to illumine our night. For God, darkness is not darkness at all. Each night offered to God's gaze, open to his presence, is light, because it is presence and communion. The light of Christ broke in two the darkness of our world. The Exultant sings: O blessed night. Blessed not by its darkness, but because it has opened itself to the light of Christ. Would it be too much to remember this every night? This is what Benedict asks of us: to be watchmen, and in the middle of this world's night to sing alleluia....If we are going to dare sing this song in truth, to utter it in deepest night, we need the courage to enter into the night, the courage to feel its heaviness. We must dare to share the night with so many of our brothers and sisters all over the world." ✠

Mère Thérèse-Marie Dupagne has been Prioress of the Monastère Notre-Dame D'Hurtebise in Belgium since 1997. She received a degree in Theology from the University of Strasbourg and has been a Professor of Logic at the Theological Institute Inter-Monasteries (ITIM). She is also the current Chair of the Union of Benedictines of Belgium and is passionate about the monastic life, and about creating bonds of communion between communities, and between the laity and nuns.

CIB Symposium Impressions



Mother Sylvester Jayakody, OSB
St. Helen's Monastery
Sri Lanka

I found attending the symposium very beneficial because of the avenues it provides for participants from various nations and culture to come together, share views, ideas, problems and challenges and discover ways to strengthen our own monastic vocation. It is also a great opportunity to listen to each other in a very serene and conducive atmosphere, to come to appreciate the liturgical practices of other nationalities and to pray together as a single universal family.

It was indeed an enriching experience to visit Nursia, the birth place our Holy Father St. Benedict, where the seed of monastic life had its origin and later renewing our vows together as one family at the old Church of St. Scholastica, an event to strengthen our commitment in a meaningful manner.

Placing our hope in the Lord on the lines of the psalmist who says that *"If the Lord does not build the house, in vain does the watchman keep vigil,"* is the key message I carry from the Symposium. If we lead our monastic life in faith, God would undoubtedly lead each of us individually and as a community to grow in holiness and live happily. This is not a mirage as the Lord who called us is faithful and will not let us down or disappoint us in the journey of our lives. ✠

Sister Mary Pauline Dacanay, OSB
St. Benedict Convent
Quezon City, Philippines



I was so struck by Mère Thérèse-Marie Dupagne's second presentation on ***"Living in Hope: Rediscovering the Art of Living"***. When she mentioned *"hope in the face of death"*, I was led into deep reflection. It is a coincidence that one of my favorite passages in the Rule of St. Benedict is: *"day by day remind yourself that you are going to die."* (RB 4:47) I really pondered on these words during the time of silence after her presentation.

I need to give an extra effort and, with the grace of God, humbly fulfill what the Lord is asking from me every day of my life so that I can assume in advance my own death and to make of it a hearth of life, a new hope. A sure base of hope for me is my daily experience of God's fidelity and love. The sudden death of one of my Sisters in my Priory on September 15 gave me a strong lesson on how to prepare oneself for death. St. Benedict's invitation in RB 4:47 *"to always keep death before my eyes"* gained a deeper significance for me.

I really can't thank God enough for this wonderful experience. God has been so generous and loving for allowing me to participate in this Symposium, as well as in the enriching experience of meeting Benedictine Women from various parts of the world. I can only deepen my commitment to the Lord with a hope that does not depend on me. ✠



Preparing to Renew Monastic Vows in the old Church of St. Scholastica outside Norcia

Voices from the Younger Sisters

Sister Veronica Joyner, OSB

Saint Benedict Monastery, Bristow, USA

The multi-cultural experiences of the 6th International Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB) Symposium beautifully expressed the theme of ***Benedictine Women – Witnesses of Hope***. The Symposium opened the door to a rich diversity of religious communities that filled me with awe. Attendance at the Symposium gave me a greater understanding of the struggles and accomplishments of other communities, some of which are very different from my own experiences.

A video entitled "*Interrupted Lives*" was shared by the Benedictine sisters from Lithuania. It is a documentary about the hardships and creative ways in which religious sisters had to secretly maintain their religious life in a communist culture that forbade any religion. Through faith and perseverance, the sisters and their communities survived many years of repression.

A sister from India told of her community's change of clothing from the traditional habit to a saffron-colored sari. The sisters' awareness and sensitivity to the predominantly Sikh population allowed the people they

served to become more open and trusting of Catholics, the Benedictine community, and the sisters' desire to serve.

The lay community of Sant'Egidio shared their story, a meal, and evening prayer with the CIB participants at their founding location in Rome. The group, formed in the 1960's by a small band of energetic and committed Italian high school students, continue to assist the poor and work for peace. Through their communal prayer and faithfulness to their cause, the group can now boast of an international membership numbering in the thousands and share their methods of peace with others, methods that have been able to halt wars.

From these experiences and many others provided through the generosity of the CIB, my American perspective on the dynamism of religious life has been greatly expanded. I feel challenged to continue learning more about our Benedictine sisters who reside in other countries so I can connect at a deeper level with their struggles and their efforts to promote dignity for all. ✠



"The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ



Sister Jacinta Mathew, OSB
Ashirbhan Prory
Bhopal, India

The CIB Symposium with the theme "Benedictine Women: Witnesses of Hope" has put me once again in ecstasy of hope for the future of monastic life.

It was all together a 'tonic drinking' experience which I am taking along with me to my future life not as a preacher alone but to be really a witness to the world around me, that everyone together with me may be able to sing the "Alleluia" even in the dark nights of our lives. The 2010 CIB Symposium helped me to drink from the sweetness of the richness that is in Benedictine monasticism from different cultures around the world. ✠



Young Sisters Roundtable Discussion



Sr. Janine Mettling leading the chant during the opening ritual

M. Henriette playing the West African Kora





Sister Metilda George, OSB
Grace and Compassion Priory,
India

I found listening to the talks on 'Witnesses of Hope as Benedictine Women in the World' very inspiring and encouraging, especially listening to the views of our young sisters. The presentation by the young sisters brought a closer understanding of their views and struggles and helped the senior sisters to appreciate the value of accepting them for their shortcomings and weaknesses whilst bearing in mind that it is human to err. ✚



Break time in the cloister

Sr. Maria-Magdalena Shetunyenga, OSB
Prioress General,
Benedictine Sisters of Oshikuku, Namibia

After my studies in Rome, which I finished in 1991, I was happy to be in Rome again, the ancient and Christian City with different holy places and lots of shrines. I like Rome.

Before going to the Symposium I had mixed feelings of being somehow happy and unsure of what will happen there. When reaching Sant'Anselmo and seeing so many good friendly Benedictine Family members, my feelings changed into hope.

What did the Symposium reveal to me?



After the Symposium I feel that there are so many things which I need to put into practice or to reinforce in our Congregation, however I will only mention a few of them.

First of all, I learned that to have accommodation for Benedictines means to show hospitality to people coming to us; it means to invite these people to pray with

us. For me this was something to be started with.

Then I felt that I belong to a big family and the CIB does not isolate but unites all Benedictine Women, no matter where they are. I felt accepted.

I have decided to explain this to my whole Congregation so that the sisters will know what is going on in the Benedictine Family (CIB).

Secondly, I felt that there was planted a seed of hope, faith and attitude in me to do more than I used to do, because I learned much from other CIB members about things I knew little of or nothing at all. I was encouraged to continue and put into practice what I learned so that I can be with my fellow CIB members, especially in that which concerns Benedictine Spirituality. Listening to presenters I realized also that our Congregation is not as behind as I thought.

The revelations I received from the Symposium give me a new hope, a new way of thinking and a new attitude to do things. I've decided to open the eyes of my fellow sisters, because some of them do not know anything about CIB or those who do know, know little.

I would like to thank *the* Administrative Committee for their excellent preparation which enabled the Symposium to go smoothly so that all members took part. ✚



Panel presentation by Mothers Henriette, Isabel, Agnes and Angela (talks available online)



Srs. Sophia, Maria Clemens, and Mariangela who helped in the Secretariat

2010 CIB Conference Meeting News

CIB Handbook:

The new 2nd edition of the CIB Handbook was printed this past summer in order to provide each Symposium participant with a copy in one of five languages. The new Handbook contains the new CIB Statutes approved September 2009, the updated Normae, and other updated documents. Many thanks to Mary Robinson, Sr. Clare Condon's administrative assistant in Australia, who did a wonderful and beautiful job putting the Handbooks together and getting them printed! (She also created the beautiful opening ceremony slideshow for the Symposium.)

Finances:

Sr. Clare Condon reported that some of the money, needed to pay for this year's Symposium, had to be taken from the CIB accounts. This was due to the continued decrease in earned interest because of the ongoing recession, and to the fact that the total regional contributions were decreased this past year. The CIB did receive money from the Hilton Foundation (USA) and the Archbishop of Sydney, Australia. Overall, however, the CIB obtained only two-thirds of the amount needed to pay for the Symposium, so the rest had to be taken from the CIB accounts.

The Regions were reminded to pay their yearly contribution for the Solidarity fund (due by July 1) in order to help with the Symposium expenses. Regions should pay whatever they can even if they are unable to give the entire amount.

CIB Secretariat:

The CIB Secretariat was finally moved this July from Assisi to the Monastero Sant'Antonio Abate in Rome, where Mother Michela Porcellato has graciously given the CIB space to store its materials and archives. Many thanks to Sisters Monica Lewis and Marta Tedeshini Lalli, who worked on this move! This will be a great help having the materials so close to many of the CIB meetings.

CIB Website: www.benedictines-cib.org

The website is now available in six languages, although some languages have more information available than others (due to some shortages of translators and their time). There is also a page on the website about the 2010 CIB Symposium, along with complete talks, photos, and the opening ceremony video of pictures from the regions.

Young Benedictine Sisters Website:

Starting June, 2010, a website for "younger" Benedictine sisters worldwide has been set up by Sr. Benedict Brown of Turvey Abbey in England at: www.youngbenedictines.org. Since there is no official organization of young Benedictine sisters and nuns, the website is a sort of meeting space for them to share information, reports of Benedictine meetings (regional or international), and post photos, videos, and links to their online blogs. Anyone who would like to contribute information regarding young sisters from their region may send it to: sr.benedict@turveyabbey.org.uk.

CIB Membership Updates:

Region 5:

M. Madeleine Boland from Belgium is the new substitute delegate.

Region 18:

Sr. Maria-Magdalena Shetunyenga from Namibia was elected delegate, and M. Theodora Ntuli was elected as the substitute.

Region 19:

Sr. Metilda George is the new delegate and M. Teresita D'Silva is the new substitute delegate. Both are from India.

Future CIB Meetings:

January 10-12, 2011:

Admin. Council meeting at Sant'Antonio in Rome. Italy

September, 2011:

CIB Conference meeting in Danyi-Apéyémé, Togo

September, 2012:

CIB Conference meeting in Rome, Italy, in conjunction with the Congress of Abbots meeting

2013: CIB Conference meeting in Brazil (Dates pending)

2014: 7th International CIB Symposium in Rome, Italy

Goals and Directions for 2010-2014:

The Symposium facilitators, Jill McCorquodale and Sr. Patty Fawcner, sgs, worked with the Conference members to help them identify goals they would most likely want to foster during the next four years. After much discussion and listening, the CIB Conference decided to commit itself to the following **three** Goals:

1. **Solidarity:** to build mutual support within our communities, across our Regions and throughout the world.
2. **Authenticity:** to live in personal and communal fidelity to Benedictine life as women of the Word, refounding from within while facing with passion, joy and hope the challenges of our time.
3. **Reverence:** to be committed to justice and peace through profound reverence for each other, recognizing the sacredness of the earth and all peoples, especially children.

2011 CIB Conference Meeting

M. Henriette Kalmogo from Burkina Faso formally invited the CIB delegates to West Africa for the 2011 CIB Conference meeting. It will be held **September 2-16, 2011** at the Monastère de L'Assomption in Danyi-Apéyémé, Togo. The nearest airport to fly into is located in **Lomé, Togo**. There will also be trips to visit monasteries in Ghana and Benin. Visas and vaccinations, including yellow fever, will be needed by most of the Conference members.

2011 CIB Conference Meeting Togo

Important Dates:

Aug 31: Arrival of Administrative Council, Burkina Faso

Sept 2: Arrival of Conference members, Lomé, Togo

Sept 4.5.9: Conference meetings

Sept 16: Conference meeting ends midday

Sept 17: Departure

CIB Secretary Change

It is with mixed feelings that I have resigned from the office of CIB Secretary. Over these past two years, I have gotten to know so many of you through email and in person. My life has been enriched by your lives and cultures and broadened in outlook. I can no longer read news of your countries without having a sense of a personal connection, because of you. I thank you and Sr. Judith Ann for enabling me to be a part of the CIB for this time. I especially wish to thank all those who made this Symposium such a great experience: the translators, secretaries, facilitators, planning team, and, of course, Sr. Judith Ann and the Administration Council. I will remember all of you fondly.



Sr. Mary Rardin at work



Sr. Mary Jane Vergotz

Sr. Mary Jane Vergotz from Mount St. Benedict in Erie, Pennsylvania has graciously volunteered to be the new CIB secretary. She was the Coordinator for the 2010 Symposium, so many of you have gotten to know her. I know she will be excellent and I wish her all the best. ✕

***"And finally, never lose hope in
God's mercy."***

RB 4:74