

CIB Conference – Croatia

Daily log

Submitted by Sister Nancy Bauer, Region 9 delegate

Day 1, Thursday, September 3

At 8 a.m., the CIB Conference members, along with a number of Sisters from the host monastery of St. Mary (Samostan Sveta Marije), left Zadar for a two-hour excursion by boat to the Kornati Islands. Our first stop was a Nature Park called Telascica on Dugi Otok (Long Island) where we were greeted by a pack of donkeys. Some of us hiked to the lake on the island and refreshed our feet in the cool water. Others hiked uphill to view the limestone cliffs. A few of us did both. We gathered for a wonderful lunch of mackerel and veal at the restaurant on the island and then boarded our boat again for a fishing town called Sali. We had Mass there, followed by a reception in front of the church. The people of Sali entertained us with the „thunderous singing“ for which Croatians are known and treated us to the delicate pastries for which they are known. We boarded our boat a final time and returned to Zadar about 9:30 pm under a full moon that spilled its light across the Adriatic Sea. Sr. Judith Ann Heble, CIB moderator, noted the importance of beginning the meeting of the Conference with such an outing so that we can become acquainted (or reacquainted) with each other.

Day 2, Friday, September 4

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf joined the Conference for our first day of meetings. The Abbess of the Zadar monastery, M. Anastazija Čizmin formally welcomed us. Then, Sr. Judith Ann led us through the day's agenda, which began with Prior Jozo's (from the monastery at Čokovak) report on the history of the church and of Benedictine monasticism in Croatia. Then, Sr. Benedikta Halilovic, president of the Croatian Federation of the eight Benedictine monasteries of women, read her paper entitled, "Benedictine Nuns in the Region of Today's Croatia." She noted that, because of Communist control of the country at the time of Vatican II, the Croatian monasteries were isolated from the renewal taking place in the church. She was very forthright about the challenges that the nuns face today and the importance for them of being in contact with other monasteries within CIB.

Day 3, Saturday, September 5

We traveled by bus, ferry, foot, van and "little boats" from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. We visited Čokovak, the only men's Benedictine monastery in Croatia. The monastery is located on top of a hill on the Island of Pašman. There are six members. Abbot Primate celebrated Eucharist with us. Then we had a tour of the monastery and prayed midday prayer. Following lunch at a nearby restaurant, we headed to Sutomišćica on the Island of Ugljan. This is the hometown of several of the Zadar nuns, including the abbess, M. Anastazija. Women and girls of the parish, dressed in native costume, welcomed us with song and serenaded us through the streets on our way to the birthplace of M. Anastazija. In three locations, we were entertained with music and treated to local delicacies. Then three girls carrying a picture of St. Benedict led a procession to the Church of St. Euphemia for vespers. Our next destination was a very small island to visit the TOR Franciscan monastery of St. Paul the Hermit, which was formerly a Benedictine monastery before Napoleon gave it to the Franciscans. Here we enjoyed a lovely concert and a substantial dinner. Finally, we boarded the ferry back to Zadar.

Day 4, Sunday, September 6

Some of us, exhausted from the international travel to get to Zadar and the events of our first days here, made this a day of rest. Others went on the scheduled outing to Nin, site of the ninth-century Church of the Holy Trinity. The day ended about 10 p.m. after a concert at the Zadar monastery followed by supper.

Day 5: Monday, September 7, 2009

The Conference members met in the morning. Sister Judith Ann Heble presented plans for the 2010 symposium in Rome. The theme for the symposium is "Benedictine Women: Witnesses of Hope." We also received the financial report from Sister Clare Condon. Sister Mary Rardin, CIB secretary, gave an update on the CIB website, which is now managed by a Sister of Turvey Abbey in England. In the evening we were treated to a concert/recital of song and instrumentals by the nuns of the Zadar monastery and some of the students of their Music School. We did not have meetings scheduled in the afternoons because afternoons in Zadar are very short. The monastery has midday prayer at 1 p.m., followed by lunch, followed by siesta time, with Vespers at 5 p.m. Consequently, mornings are quite long. Sometimes, we also met in the evening between Vespers and dinner.

Day 6: Tuesday, September 8, 2009

This was a day of liturgical celebration and museum visits. The Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the patronal feast of the Zadar Monastery of St. Mary. Abbot Primate Notker Wolf celebrated a morning Mass in the monastery church, and Archbishop Ivan Prenda of Zadar and a number of local priests concelebrated an evening Mass. The local people filled the church for the evening Mass. The monastery has a statue of the infant Mary dressed in swaddling clothes and women lined up to caress and kiss it, leaving flowers and other gifts. We visited the Permanent Exhibition of Religious Art Zadar, a museum established and maintained by the Zadar monastery. The nuns sheltered the religious artifacts of the Zadar region throughout the destruction of World War II and established the museum in the 1970s. Artifacts date from the eighth to the late eighteenth centuries and include reliquaries, chalices, paintings, icons, statues and crucifixes. We also visited an anthropological museum and a museum that features the culture of Croatian villages.

Day 7: Wednesday, September 9, 2009

This was a day of Conference meetings. We received reports and updates on the Catalogus, the CIB Secretariat, the CIB Electronic Reference Library (CERL), CIB goals and AIM. Sister Clare Condon led us in reflection and sharing on the topic of hope in preparation for the 2010 Symposium. Sister Judith Ann announced that the 2011 Conference will be held in West Africa. Mother Zoë Davis, Turvey Abbey, England, reported that a third gathering of young Benedictine Sisters from Europe will be held in Belgium in 2010. About 20 Sisters from nine countries attended the previous gatherings. Delegates gave updates on what is happening in their regions. Briefly, here are a few highlights: from Region 4, Mother Zoë announced that Stanbrook Abbey has completed its relocation to Yorkshire; from Region 1, Mother Gian Paola Pederzoli noted that federations are forming in Italy; from Region 14, Mother Mary John Mananzan said the Benedictines of the Philippines meet annually; from Region 9, Sister Christine Vladimiroff gave an update on the Apostolic Visitation of U.S. Institutes of Women Religious and the doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR); from Region 15, Sister Clare Condon announced the first perpetual profession of a Benedictine Sister in Oceania; from Region 18, Mother Theodora Ntuli noted that monasteries in this area are in the process of forming an association; from Region 3, Mother Fabienne Hyon, reported that the monasteries of France meet every three years and will meet next in February 2010. This day of meetings ended with a closing ritual as our remaining days in Croatia are filled with outings. As part of the ritual, the CIB candle was passed from Mother Anastazija Cizmin of Zadar to Mother Gian Paola Pederzoli of Italy as the next meeting will take place during the 2010 symposium in Rome.

Day 8: Thursday, September 10, 2009

We traveled by bus to the Island of Pag which is connected to Zadar by a bridge. We visited the Monastery of St. Margarita, where we also met Benedictine nuns from the Islands of Cres, Krk and Rab. The nuns of St. Margarita are noted for making lace and for baking hard rolls called baškotin. The island is noted for cheese made from sheep's milk, and for packaging of sea salt. A group of teenage girls and boys from the island, dressed in traditional costume, entertained us with traditional dances on the plaza in front of the parish Church of St. Mary. Then we had Eucharist in the monastery church and time for visiting. We had midday prayer in the Church of St. Mary and were wined and dined at a local restaurant where the mayor of the City of Pag greeted us and gifted us with souvenirs.

Day 9: Friday, September 11, 2009

We visited the Monastery of St. Lucy in the town of Šibenik. Benedictine nuns from Hvar and Trogir also met us there. We had Mass and refreshments at the monastery. Then we walked to the Cathedral of St. James (Jakova), which was built in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Our next stop was National Park Krka, famed for its waterfalls. We had lunch in the park and then boarded a boat for Visovac Island, site of a Franciscan monastery. We had a quick tour of the monastery's museum and church and then boated back to our bus and headed "home" to Zadar.

Day 10: Saturday, September 12, 2009

Until today, we remained in the area of Croatia near the Adriatic Sea. Early this morning, we boarded a bus and headed for the Alps. Narrow serpentine roads took us through quaint little mountain villages and agricultural areas, lush with vineyards, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens. We slowed down for a flock of sheep that was grazing along the road. The bus made a steep climb around hairpin turns and we arrived at the pilgrim Church of Our Lady of Krasno in the Velebit mountain chain. We had Mass and lunch and then hairpinned our way to Plitvice Lakes National Park. This is a paradise of beautiful blue-green lakes, waterfalls, cascades, caves and forests. It is home to brown bears (although we didn't see any), numerous species of butterflies, orchids and other flora and fauna. On our way back to Zadar, we made a scheduled stop at a restaurant for a dinner of trout and veal. We arrived back in Zadar late at night, grateful for the experience and looking forward to a day of rest on Sunday.

Day 11: Sunday, September 13, 2009

Our last full day in Croatia. We attended prayers and meals in the monastery. Otherwise, conference delegates rested and packed. Some took one last stroll along the Zadar waterfront.

Day 12: Monday, September 14, 2009

Delegates who did not leave on Sunday, left for the Zadar airport at 5 a.m. and began their long journeys back to their own monasteries. I flew from Zadar to Zagreb to Amsterdam to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Two hours by car and I arrived back at Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota. I stood outside for a moment and looked at our Sacred Heart Chapel and other monastery buildings. It all looked just as it did when I left two weeks earlier, but I will never see it in the same way as I did before my experience in Croatia.