

CIB MODERATOR'S REPORT
Symposium, September 10, 2014
Prepared by: Sister Judith Ann Heble, OSB, Moderator

Good evening my dear Sisters and guests to this 2014 Symposium. It is amazing how quickly four years go by and here we are together once again for another Symposium.

Four years ago, the CIB Conference set three goals for the years, 2010-2014. The Administrative Council and Conference of the CIB have been processing these goals at each of our meetings, using them as the direction for our activities. I think that you will see how we focused on the goals and how important the setting of measurable goals is to all of the activities of the CIB.

The Conference of the CIB met yesterday, September 9, 2014, to set goals for the next four years. We will meet again after the Symposium on September 18, 2014, to finalize the goals and to elect a Moderator, Assistant Moderator and two Council Members. Two more Council Members will be appointed after these elections.

At this time, I would like to report to you on what has taken place under each of these goals over the past four years.

GOAL 1 – SOLIDARITY

To build mutual support within our communities, across our Regions and throughout the world.

In September of 2011, the Administrative Council met at the monastery of Notre Dame de Koubri in Burkina Faso, West Africa, the monastery of our long-time friend and Delegate, Mère Henriette Wêndbala Kalmogo. We also had the occasion to meet with the Ambassador over breakfast at his residence and experienced his genuine concern for the people of West Africa.

We are most grateful to the Sisters of the Monastère de l'Assomption in Dzogbégan, West Africa for hosting us. Special gratitude to Sister Marie Fidegnon for handling all of the details for our time in West Africa.

At the meeting of the Conference in Dzobégan, West Africa, Mother Paul Galland of Côte d'Ivoire shared insights on each of the goals from the perspective of the communities of West Africa. Delegates responded by sharing similarities and differences from their Regions regarding the goals.

Highlights of our visit to West Africa included having the occasion to meet and celebrate with the people of the village of Dzobégan. An African Chief and many people from the village welcomed us. They even invited us to join them in dancing accompanied by the traditional African drumming.

We also had occasion to celebrate a lively liturgy with a parish community at Assumption Monastery in Sodari. The Sisters at St. Joseph's Monastery in Toffo, Benin, welcomed us and offered us gracious hospitality.

A special event was held on September 8, 2011, when we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the CIB – born and officially named, "*Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*" also in Africa, but in Kenya, East Africa in 2001. Birthday cake was served at a gazebo near the waterfalls in Ghana. A torrential rainfall was also part of the experience, not only getting us wet, but, I believe, showering down many blessings upon the CIB.

It is at this meeting in West Africa, the first after our last Symposium in 2010, that the Delegates determined that "listen" would be the theme of this 2014 Symposium. Subsequent meetings of the Administrative Council and Conference would unfold the plans around this theme which you will experience at this Symposium.

In January of 2012, the Administrative Council was privileged to be hosted by the Benedictine Sisters on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Our visits to the Benedictine communities in Bethlehem, Tabgha, and Abu Ghosh deepened our understanding of the situation there between the Palestinians and Israelis as we maneuvered through various checkpoints. Our solidarity in faith was enhanced by our visits to many of the holy places in Israel.

In September, 2012, the CIB Conference met at a Diocesan conference center in the mountains of Valledacqua, Italy. The Camoldolese Nuns of Sant'Antonio have a small monastery there where they provide adult formation sessions for the people of the area. This little community welcomed us to their lovely chapel as we prayed and celebrated Eucharist with them. A number of Italian abbesses from the area joined us on one of the days for a delicious lunch and a sharing session. It is very true that "pictures speak louder than words". Each one brought pictures of their chapel, community and refectory as together we learned something of one another's communities. The Italian abbesses shared the challenges they face in living their monastic life in Italy. Each group determined ways that we would stay in solidarity with one another for the coming year along with extending a heartfelt blessing to those in the group.

On our way back to Rome, we visited San Marco Monastery in Offida. There we celebrated Eucharist with the community, viewed a video of the community and participated in a magnificent dinner with the community. Mother Benedetta D'Angelo and her community were most gracious to us.

From September 17-25, 2012, nineteen of the CIB Delegates experienced solidarity with 235 of our brother monks at the Congress of Abbots. The bonds of *communio* were strengthened within the Benedictine family of men and women during this time together. Conversation and even laughter filled the air during meals, break times and excursions together. An openness to and sense of gratitude for each other were apparent throughout the meetings and the discussions. The Abbot Primate welcomed us

warmly. Over the years, Abbot Primate Notker Wolf has been noticeably supportive of the CIB. I have found him to collaborate most willingly and joyfully with us.

In January, 2013, the Administrative Council met at Turvey Abbey in England. We had the occasion to meet members of the monk's community at of the Monastery of Christ Our Savior and to tour their community situated next door to Turvey Abbey. Daily the monks pray the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrate Eucharist with the women's community in the Sisters' lovely chapel.

Being in England during the week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we had occasion to visit Mucknell Abbey – an Anglican community of men and women. There we celebrated Mass and None with the community, had dinner with this community, and had the occasion to provide for them an orientation to the CIB.

Prior to returning to our respective communities, we had the privilege of being hosted by the Congregation of Grace and Compassion in Brighton, England where we prayed with the community and enjoyed a lovely meal together. Mother Kathy Yeeles, Prioress General, is here with us. Thank you for your warm hospitality during this cold and snowy time of the year.

In September, 2013, the CIB Conference traveled to Region 11, Brazil, where Mother Martha Lúcia Ribeiro Teixeira and Mother Vania Maria Toscano de Britto, Delegate and Substitute to the CIB, organized a memorable experience for us. Mosteiro da Encarnação was a perfect location for our meetings as this small community of Camoldolese nuns have a comfortable conference center.

At Santa Maria Abbey in São Paulo, the first female monastery in Brazil, another twenty abbesses, prioresses and sisters, journeyed to São Paulo and joined us for Eucharist, a delicious meal. We had a delightful shared *lectio* and “getting to know you” session with the Brazilian nuns and sisters. Again, pictures provided us with the occasion to introduce ourselves to one another. Sister Roberta Peluso de Oliveira made a presentation on the social situation of Brazil, and, along with Mother Vera Lúcia Parreiras Horta of Mosteiro do Salvador, further shared on the challenges the communities face living their monastic life in Brazil.

Mother Martha Lúcia hosted us in her community for Eucharist, an elaborate brunch and tours of her lovely monastery. Sister Cristina Lavinhati, of Mother Martha Lúcia's community, was the principal organizer and contact person for us. We recently received a lovely pictorial DVD of our experiences that Sister Cristina prepared for us. Marvelous memories abound!

Mother Vera Lúcia of Salvador and the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing at Santo Amaro College in Rio de Janeiro and the Priory in Olinda, Brazil, offered us rooms in their monasteries and welcomed us for prayer, Eucharist and meals with their communities. The Sisters even invited the CIB Delegates to “learn” the steps to some of the Brazilian folk dances.

I believe that we visited some fourteen communities while we were in Brazil. Five of them were communities of monks. There is an obvious collaborative relationship among the monks, nuns and sisters in Brazil. The monks offered us gracious hospitality in their communities and provided us with most festive Brazilian foods. The time spent there was a wonderful experience of “communio” with our Benedictine sisters and brothers in Brazil.

All was not just touring the glories of Brazil. Through the planning of Mother Vera Lucia, we had the opportunity to be exposed to the noticeable contrasts between the poor and the rich. We were amazed at what the sisters and nuns are doing for the poor children by way of clothing and education. On September 14, 2013, the people of Salvador welcomed us to their much poorer area. They were honored that the CIB chose to come to their location. Actually, the honor was ours. The people brought special foods for a warm and friendly reception for us after Mass.

In West Africa, Italy and again in Brazil, we had occasion to meet and hear from the local Bishop as to the challenges the Church faces in these Regions. Their genuine and out-going cordiality to us was evident. We were honored that they took the time to be with us.

One of the most recent displays of solidarity was the response to a simple email that was sent out informing us that our Sisters in the Philippines were deeply affected by Typhoon Yolanda (Hayan). The outpouring of support was admirable. I am sure that the Sisters here from the Philippines will attest to their deepest gratitude for the solidarity that they had with us during this horrific event.

Through the insights we have gained by visiting a number of monasteries, we are slowly, very slowly, coming to understand the “many faces” of 21st century monasticism as we are exposed at a grassroots level to these differing cultures. As our relationships with one another are deepening, we are building a global consciousness and a firmer foundation of mutual support and solidarity with one another all around the world.

GOAL 2 – AUTHENTICITY

To live in personal and communal fidelity to Benedictine life as women of the Word, refunding from within while facing with passion, joy and hope the challenges of our time.

Wherever we traveled, all of our meetings have been clothed with both liturgical and informal prayer times. At every monastery we visited from West Africa, to Italy to Brazil, to Israel, and to England, we were moved by the fidelity of the communities to “put nothing before the Work of God”. We were always welcomed to pray the Liturgy of the Hours or to celebrate the Eucharist with the host community. Though we generally prayed in the language of the host community, they made careful preparations to have sufficient books and materials for us to use. They were solicitous in making sure that we knew how to follow their particular format of prayer.

You will notice that the goal mentions living authentically as “women of the Word”. The meetings of the CIB Administrative Council and of the Conference have always included shared *lectio* with one another. Those responsible for the shared *lectio* were careful to prepare a meaningful process that included everyone. We are becoming more and more comfortable in sharing deeply with one another.

In Valledacqua, Italy in 2012, we had occasion to engage in a process on the fundamentals of monastic life, sharing with one another the monastic value that is our personal strength and our personal challenge.

As we anticipated the theme of this Symposium on “listening”, we experienced a process of shared silence and listening, going to an ever deeper level as to how we discern the difference between “my voice” and “God’s voice”.

In Brazil in 2013, we engaged in processes on the three-fold theme of this Symposium: reflecting and sharing on a Word of God that has changed our lives and how that Word still challenges and changes us.

When we reflected on “Listening in the Rule of Benedict”, we were challenged to reflect on and share our own experience of listening to our Sisters in community. How do we deal with the tension when there is conflict between the individual and the common good? How do we come to peace with that tension? We examined our own listening efforts in community: is it with the ear of our heart?

As we moved to the third aspect of this Symposium theme, we had a process on listening to the signs of the times on September 8th, the Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This gave us occasion to reflect on Mary as a model of listening – pondering the Word in her heart. Each one brought a picture that speaks to them of their Region’s needs which in turn provided the impetus for sharing the challenges the pictures posed to us.

In all of the communities, it was most noticeable that the Sisters were faithful in extending most gracious hospitality to one another, to us as their guests, and to the various groups of people from the area that we had occasion to meet. Our sisters are most faithful to their monastic life even as they face with passion, joy and hope the challenges in their respective Region.

GOAL 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.

We heard from the Regions how reverence is manifested in the Sisters’ commitment to justice and peace. We experienced first-hand the difficulties a Region has to endure in traveling from one location to another. Our understanding was deepened regarding the political and social tensions a particular Region faces.

While we were in West Africa, in 2011, our visit to Quidah enabled us to enter into the suffering of those involved in the slave trade. The “Point of No Return” arch on the western African shores of the Atlantic is a stark reminder of that awful event for which many of our western countries hold responsibility. In 2000, a “Door of Return” was erected, conveying the hope that the people of West Africa still hold in their hearts.

We were exposed to the variety of cultures – not just driving through the cities or the countryside – but in being further exposed to the cultural foods and dances and the natural beauties of the lands we visited. This exposure developed in us an appreciation for the sacredness these lands, museums and shrines hold for the peoples who live there. A highlight of our time in Brazil was our visit to the Basilica of Aparecida. Claudio Pasto, the renowned Brazilian artist and architect, and friend of many of the Benedictine Sisters in Brazil, served as our personal guide as we explored this remarkable Basilica.

Our relationships have been most expressive of reverence. In listening to one another, we are becoming more aware and respectful of the different cultures from which we all come. We are developing the skills necessary to listen to another’s point of view and to respect the rights and opinions of one another. There exists an atmosphere among us that is welcoming and open to genuine sharing – a sensitivity to include all in the conversation. Each one seems genuinely concerned for the growth and development of the CIB. It is obvious that there exists a true love of the CIB and a sincere appreciation for the work of the “pioneers” of the CIB who have brought us to this point in our history. What was very obvious was the reverence in how the lay people of the areas view their nuns and sisters. They truly love the Sisters.

Yes, it takes time and money for us to come together for meetings of the CIB. As the Abbot Primate recently told us, coming together is more important than sending emails to each other. We need to meet face-to-face.

Our coming together at least once a year, not only keeps us abreast of the goings on in the world of Benedictine women, but it is strengthening the bonds between us so that mutual support and exchange of ideas and experiences can be a reality. We truly love one another and each time we meet, we rejoice at being with one another again. Some conversations seem to pick up where they left off the last time we were together. Though there are obvious differences among us, we have come to appreciate the fact that we share a common life, a common charism, a common vision.

Other CIB Activities:

We have enhanced our website. It is a very interesting and newsy website to visit. It is maintained by Sister Benedict Brown from Turvey Abbey, England. Sister Benedict is here with us. Thank you, Sister Benedict for doing this for the CIB. Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, secretary of the CIB, provides the oversight of data displayed on our website. The website address is on the back of your copy of the CIB Handbook.

We publish an annual CIB newsletter usually after our September meeting. Sister Mary Jane collects the articles and she, along with Sister Katherine Horan, from her community in Erie, PA, prepares it for all of us. These newsletters have included some beautiful photos that tell a story in themselves as well as touching accounts Delegates have submitted of personal experiences in the communities we have visited in the Regions. This has been a wonderful opportunity to share with everyone what is going on in the CIB.

We also publish a CIB News Bulletin after meetings of the CIB Administrative Council. Delegates are able to keep abreast of what is going on in the CIB and to know what will be taking place at future meetings.

Communication, however, remains a real challenge. It is not only the communication that the Moderator and the Administrative Council share with all of the Regions, but even more importantly, the communication that should go on among the communities in a given Region. It is the responsibility of the CIB Delegate to send CIB information to all of the communities in her Region. Some Regions have built up a real network among the communities of Benedictine women of their Region by meeting together at least once a year. Other Regions have more difficulty to meet together. Therefore, the Delegate needs to find creative ways to disseminate the information to the communities in her Region. I would hope that over the next four years, greater effort would be placed on this so that the bonds among us can be more effectively strengthened.

We have found that providing an orientation for new Delegates has been helpful in making it possible for new Delegates to understand the scope of the workings of the CIB. I would hope that this practice continues on a regular basis.

I have been personally assuming the task of presenting the CIB to various communities. I was on sabbatical a couple of years ago and had the occasion to explain the development and the workings of the CIB to seven different communities, including my own. I learned that they knew very little about the CIB despite how long I have been involved in the CIB. I have also been asked to give a report at the Congress of Abbots and at the annual meetings of the Board for AIM International.

We have again updated the CIB Handbook. Mary Robinson, the secretary to Sister Clare Condon, the Prioress General of the Good Samaritan Sisters in Australia, has done this for us several times. Mary Robinson is here with us at this meeting. We thank you, Mary, for all you have done for the CIB over the years. Thank you, Sister Clare, for sharing Mary's gifts with all of us. Mary has also prepared the slide presentation that you will be seeing before each of our sessions – as a running pictorial of all of our Regions. Mary has also done some grant writing for us so that we can obtain funds to help defray the cost of the Symposium.

The big project has been the publishing of a new *Catalogus*, the Directory of all of the Benedictine women's communities consociated with the Confederation. The last issue of the *Catalogus* was 2006. There have been many changes that have taken place

over the seven years. This is a huge task that takes at least a year to accomplish. There are some 1000 pages in the book showing the entries of some 13,800 Benedictine women.

Mother Mariangela Yator of Sant'Giuseppe Monastery in Assisi, along with some of the nuns from the Monastery of Sant'Anna in Bastia, have been responsible for collecting the data. Sister Felicitas Seisenberger of Abtei Venio in Germany prepared the final copy for the printers. Sister Felicitas is here with us. She had also prepared the 2006 *Catalogus*.

We have been able to keep this new *Catalogus* at the same price as the 2006 edition: €50. It is for sale in one of the rooms here at Sant'Anselmo. You will certainly want to have a copy for your community and its archives. Those of you who have schools or are near universities or a monk's community, may also wish a copy for them. A *Catalogus* is more than a list of members of an organization and a basic reference book. A *Catalogus* helps to build a sense of identity and awareness that the world of Benedictine women is a global family where all share the same vision: seeking God in a way of life totally centered on Christ. Our *Catalogus* contains a wealth of information that you will certainly want to have.

There is an order blank in your folder. Delegates should make copies for all of the communities of their Region. I suggest that you buy yours while you are here to avoid paying the shipping charges. We will have an order blank on the CIB website should you wish to order copies later. The books will be stored at Mother Mariangela's community in Assisi. She will see to it that a supply is kept here at Sant'Anselmo in the bookstore.

Please join me in thanking both Mother Mariangela and Sister Felicitas. Both Sisters have provided an invaluable service for all of us. Also, I want to thank their communities for making it possible for them to do this work for all of us.

When we were in Brazil, Sister Scholastika Häring, of Abtei St. Scholastika, Dinklage, Germany shared with the CIB Conference her work on the CIB for her dissertation. She is with us today to share with all of us what she has put together. This is a valuable source of information that you will certainly find most informative. Thank you, Sister Scholastika. Thank you, also, Mother Franziska for allowing her to join us.

Something that has surfaced a year or so ago was the expanding of our collaboration and solidarity to include the monks. The Administrative Council discussed the idea and propose to the next Moderator and Council to work closely with the Abbot Primate to see how this could be possible. Perhaps something can be arranged for some type of meeting together for the purpose of praying together, doing visioning together for the Order, and dealing with issues together that call for a mutual response. I am sure that you will be kept apprised of any developments in this area.

I wish to take this occasion to thank Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, our faithful secretary of the CIB. I have found her to be a wonderfully collaborative person. Thank you, Sister Mary Jane. I also want to thank another sister from her community, Sister Linda Romey, who has been the CIB Treasurer. She, along with Sister Caterina Görden of Engelthal, Germany have been keeping our financial records up to date. Sister Caterina is here with us and will be collecting fees these days should you need to make any payments.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I would like to say that my heart is filled with gratitude to you for the great honor you have given to me in trusting me to be the Moderator of the CIB. It is an awesome responsibility, but truly a rewarding one. I have found my involvement in this ministry in the world of Benedictine women a most rewarding, challenging and energizing experience. Your support and cooperation over the years has given me the strength to embrace all of you in this CIB circle of mutual support. Having the privilege of visiting many of your communities in different parts of the world has opened my eyes to the richness of the Benedictine charism which we all share and the variety of ways in which we witness to this charism. These experiences have stretched my vision beyond my own community and Federation, beyond my country ... to see firsthand and experience other forms of monastic life in the different cultures and to witness the embracing of this sacred call to seek God in this monastic way of life. Thank you for demonstrating to me this ever-broadening and truly beautiful reality. May Christ "bring us all together to everlasting life." (RB 72:12)