



# Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

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### **Editorial**

I have just returned from the annual Conference meeting of the CIB which took place from 5<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> September 2005 in Poland. Once more the Conference Delegates representing the 19 regions around the globe came together praying and sharing with one another, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has in the past encouraged and blessed their work. This Newsletter summarises the various aspects of the meeting and passes on news items of general interest. It is shorter than in the past because the foundation has now been laid and basic information is no longer necessary. I would like to refer those who wish to know more to the CIB website [www.benedictines-cib.com](http://www.benedictines-cib.com) where past numbers of the Newsletter as well as other information can be found.

## **ANNUAL CONFERENCE MEETING OF THE CIB DELEGATES**

For the fifth time the annual meeting of the CIB Conference met outside of Rome. A pattern is forming, picking up the positive experiences of the past. This year the *first part of the meeting*, where the delegates met on their own to discuss and share with one another, was given a full three days. It was an important part of the meeting and the growing relationships with one another helped to enrich the quality of sharing. The *second part of the meeting* was one full day, where the Polish Benedictine women presented their communities and their different charisms. The *third part of the meeting* consisted of visits to several communities and to key places with the aim of creating greater understanding on both sides. All three aspects of the meeting are documented in the following pages.

## The meeting of the delegates

*One aspect of this part of the meeting was to look into the future and pave the way for new developments.* Last year, at the Abbots' Congress 2004 they had reached their goal of recognition by the Confederatio Benedictina. At their request the Lex Propria has been updated with due mention of the CIB. So this year there was a sense of a new beginning in the air. In one year's time, September 2006, after the Symposium, the Delegates will be electing a Moderator and a Council to be in office for the next four year term. For that term it will be necessary to formulate goals through a process of discernment. This process was initiated during the days in Warsaw.

*Always at such a meeting time is reserved for work on monastic themes.* This year preliminary work was done on the theme of wisdom leadership in the rule of St. Benedict in preparation for the Symposium 2006. Four delegates of different ages and terms of office had been asked to prepare a short paper about what they had learnt. Sr. Judith Ann Heble from USA, President of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses, gave an introduction from her own experience and facilitated the session. The personal way in which each spoke encouraged sharing, and gave intimations of the themes needed to be discussed at the Symposium.



## PRAYER OF ST. AELRED

You know my heart, Lord, and that whatever you have given to Your servant, I desire to spend wholly on them, and to consume it all in their service. Grant to me then, O Lord, my God, that Your eyes may be opened upon them day and night. Tenderly spread Your wings to protect them. Stretch forth Your holy right hand to bless them. Pour into their hearts Your Holy Spirit Who may abide with them while they pray: to refresh them with devout compunction, to stimulate them with hope, to make them humble with reverence, and to inflame them with love.



## MODERATOR'S REPORT

(Extracts from the report given by M.Maire Hickey September 6, 2005)

### I

#### *Significance of Poland and Warsaw as the venue for our meeting - some reflections on our Benedictine vocation*

I would like to begin my report for the year 2004-2005 with heartfelt thanks to M. Iolanta for inviting us to hold this meeting here in Poland. Now right at the start I want to focus on this place where we are gathered for our 2005 meeting of the CIB, and to call to mind how being here in this city will be drawing us into the heart of our Benedictine vocation.

Assisi, where we held our meeting a year ago, remains unforgettable as the city of peace..... What do we think of in connection with Warsaw? Our CIB journey has led us from a place where the gospel spirit of reconciliation was palpable everywhere, to a city where criminal abuse of power by some human beings over others, and of brutal retaliation have left tragic scars of war that will take many years to heal. We know that the reconciliation process has begun and is steadily moving forward..... When we travel as Benedictine sisters and nuns, we are not visiting places just as tourists or to continue our cultural education. We know that what has happened here in recent history has something to do with our lives here and now. We know that part of the greed for power and of the violence that led to the destruction of this city in 1944 is within us. We know that our daily lives in reconciliation in our communities are a contribution to the reconciliation process between Poland and Germany, between East and West, North and South of the whole globe. Warsaw leads us deep into our contemplative vocation, into our part in the reconciliation process into which the world is being invited every day, at the centre of which is the reconciliatory self-giving of Jesus to his Father, which we celebrate daily in the holy Eucharist.

### II

#### *Where do we stand as we meet in Warsaw?*

We begin our meeting here in Warsaw with a look back to Assisi and the Abbots' Congress in Rome in 2004, taking stock of our situation one year later.

Up to now our meetings always began with a review of the goals we were striving for and hoping to reach. This time it is different. By September 2004 we had achieved important goals that we had set ourselves and had been working for, for more than 20 years. ... We are at an important juncture in our history. The Nuns and Sisters living according to the Rule of St. Benedict have become an international Communion. How are we going to be in the future? It is time for us to be **identifying the next challenges that lie on our way. That means *listening for the Word of God and the signs of the times, and identifying issues that we are being called on to take ownership of.*** It is time for us to start the process that will lead us up, just one year from now, to naming our concrete goals and visions for 2006 - 2010.

Some thoughts: After our meeting in Assisi we listened to presentations on the subject of Globalisation at the Abbots' Congress. The message came across clearly: Globalisation is here to stay. Issues are no longer just issues of small groups or individuals. All issues concern us all. Events of this past year confirmed this: we experienced global participation in the tsunami disaster in Indonesia, global interest in the death of Pope John Paul II and global participation at his funeral... War in Iraq, conflicts in Israel and Palestine, terror attacks in London and many other places are cultivating global consciousness. We are members of this world community. Being Benedictines doesn't relieve us of any of the responsibility involved in being members of this world community. But it does require us to be finding the specific quality of our responsibility, and the specific manner of exercising it. Our vision for the future will want to take account of this. Living as a Benedictine in the third Millennium will mean learning what is the responsibility of Christian monks and nuns for this world.

Benedict teaches us to live with great care and attention to the small things in daily life in the community. But his rule doesn't lead us into a neurotic compulsive focussing on one's own life and one's own community. It leads us into love for our own immediate surroundings and the people who live in them, because it leads our eyes also away from them in order to see the circle of light in which the whole world is bathed, as Benedict himself saw it. We want a vision that helps us to grasp the connection between the little and the big. We need a vision reminding us that we are called to a life of prayer, contemplation and praise of our creator in the global world.

Within the world community, Europe is at this time going through development processes that are going to be of huge importance for the world of the future. Our meeting in Warsaw, at a centre of reconciliation between East and West, will challenge us European Benedictines to formulate a vision for our contribution to bringing Christianity back to Europe.

The signs of the times are calling - not just in Europe - for concerted decision and action of Christians to live according to the Gospel in this world, knowing the powers of darkness that often seem to be closing in on us, but continuing in trust to follow the light. Spirituality is essentially something that is lived. But it needs to be formulated and communicated. The world needs Benedictine women who are living, formulating and communicating the Christian message through their existence and through their monastic hospitality. To foster the development of women's monasticism, as our Statutes say is one of our aims, we need a CIB that is helping us to live our vocation in the realities of the global world of the 21st century.

### III

#### *Wisdom leadership - a part of our vision*

I believe that when we chose „Wisdom Leadership“ as our theme for the Symposium 2006, we were setting the tone for our visioning for the CIB in the years following. Without good leadership no vision can emerge in a community, and without good leadership the best visions cannot be put into practice. At the Symposium, amongst other things, we will be talking about how a person needs to develop in order to be able to exercise good, healthy leadership. Every human being has a hunger for power, as for food and esteem. As a leader one can have a wonderful opportunity to find ways of satisfying one's own hunger for power. This is an activity that has a way of being pretty exclusive. As long as I am doing that, I am not leading at all. I am probably neglecting or even doing damage to the people I am supposed to be leading. I am afraid things have sometimes gone wrong in our communities in the past because we were not sufficiently aware of what leadership means, and of the personal development and transformation that is involved in becoming a leader in the Christian meaning of that word.

Helping to develop leadership that is humanly and spiritually healthy in Benedictine women's communities could be an inspiring element in the vision that we want to forge for the next stage of our journey.

Finally, if we are working for the future, we need to have our young and youngest sisters very much in mind. If we want to pass on a message and a vision, we need to be listening to the young and trying to understand them. We need to ask how the CIB can help our communities of nuns and sisters to find common ground with the younger generation, giving them space to grow and to learn to love life in the service of Lord.

At the end of this meeting, we shall be going back to our communities, to the daily round, of prayer, enclosure, silence, humble service, hospitality. Our CIB meeting will cause us to be going back with a deeper awareness of our participation through our monastic way of life according to the Rule of St. Benedict in the process of redemptive transformation of our world.

## Symposium 2006

The 5<sup>th</sup> International Symposium of the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* will take place in S. Anselmo, Rome from 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006 with the title:

**"Wisdom leadership: so that the strong are nourished and the weak have nothing to run from" (RB 64,19).** Sr. Ruth Fox OSB and Fr. Selvaratnam OMI have been engaged as speakers. Each of them will be taking two days to share insights on Benedictine leadership, human development and the needs of a leader in the present time. Two Australian Benedictines, Sr. Mary McDonald and Sr. Elisabeth Brennan have agreed to facilitate the meeting.

As in 2002 each region is being asked to send a newly professed sister under the age of 50 who made her final profession on or after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001. She needs to be good at communication and if possible speak two of the official languages of the meeting (English, French, Italian, Spanish, German), in order to make sharing and encounter with the others easier.

On September 15<sup>th</sup> there will be elections for the Moderator and the Administrative Council for the next four years.



### Exerpts from the paper given by Sr. Judith Ann Heble on leadership

#### a good leader is a.....

Listening person – listening heart

Accepting person – making it possible for each one to belong

- challenging by words and deeds
- empathetic and understanding

Inclusive person -- open to diversity

- incorporating all
- inclusive of all

Empowering person

- calling forth the gifts of others
- sharing responsibility with her sisters

Yes, the community expects a lot of its leader.

The community receives a lot from the leader

- who lays down her life for the members.



Sr. Judith Ann



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If you wish to read the whole presentation, this is available from Sr. Monica Lewis  
[abtei@abteiburgdinklage.de](mailto:abtei@abteiburgdinklage.de)

Also from the paper given at the CIB Conference meeting in Poland,  
by Sr. Judith Ann Heble OSB,

## ONE OF THE ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT THE LEADER AS PHYSICIAN

- The good leader is aware of her own frailties.
- She knows her own sin.
- Knows what sickness is – from experience.
- She probably has had her heart broken many times.
  
- As a wise Physician, she knows that
  - God is present in failure as well as success.
  - Today, perfection is held up as the great ideal.
  - As Mother Teresa said:  
“We are not called to success but to faithfulness.”
  
- The Physician-leader is able to acknowledge and embrace her failings – and in the midst of that to be faithful.
  
- There is story of a visitor to a monastery:
  - “What do you do in the monastery all day?”
  - The wise old monastic replied:
  - “We fall down; we get up. We fall down; we get up. We fall down; we get up.”
  
- It is from this self-knowledge that the physician-leader is able to minister to others.
- She is not judgmental or blaming of others.
- She just knows and has a deep feeling for the human condition.
  
- She is dependent on JESUS, the Healer.
  - She hates the vice, but loves the sinner.
  
- She holds with reverence and attention each Sister
  - – as a vessel of Christ
  - Gently aware not to break the fragile vessel.
  
- She is able to sustain the TRUST of the members.
  - She respects their journey
  - and holds it in confidence.
  
- She is concerned for the growth of a healthy community
  - not just physically, but psychologically, socially and spiritually.
  
- She herself is always aware
  - of her own need to work toward daily conversion.
  
- Just as a doctor may call in a specialist
  - she knows when she cannot heal,
    - and calls in other wise *senpectae*
    - to minister to the ailing member.

## Meeting with the monastic superiors of Poland

***Very much energy and effort was put in by our hostess, M. Jolanta Rzoska and her team in order to present the monastic scene in Poland.***

*This is one region where there is an existing, well functioning network between all kinds of communities living under the rule of St. Benedict, both men and women, moniales and sorores. The Camaldolese communities were represented as well as a whole village of people who had become Oblates of St. Benedict, a small group of them living in community and serving the poor. The three communities belonging to the Congregation of Perpetual Adoration were represented and also the nine women communities belonging to the congregation of The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, originally called the Polish congregation. Finally, representatives of the three communities of Benedictine men, Tuniec, Lublin and the still young foundation of Biskupów took part in the meeting. Many of these superiors stayed with the group taking part in the outings and even going with us to the north of Poland to visit the community of Żarnowiec near Danzig.*

*Much effort was made to overcome the language barrier. We even received a small CIB home-made dictionary in our kit, with helps to pronounce words, which for most people from western cultures seem unpronounceable. Italian, French and German often proved a help where English failed, and where there was no common language, the willingness to encounter one another, face to face, person to person, was a first important step, and after that it was often possible to find someone willing to interpret during conversations at meals or in the bus.*

*Besides meeting one another there were three other important methods used to help us familiarise ourselves with the monastic scene in Poland. One was the excellent display set up in the corridor showing each house and giving basic information. Another was a DVD film, made by an enthusiastic oblate of Żarnowiec, who had visited all 18 houses in Poland with his camera and had recorded interviews with the sisters. Finally everyone received in their kit a map of Poland with full information of all Benedictine monasteries or dependant houses as well as pictures of some of these. The effort made in preparing these was especially appreciated because this made it very easy to pass on information to the communities at home.*



## An Overview of the Benedictine Women's communities in Poland

Congregation	number of houses	special charisma
Missionary Benedictines of Otwock	about 30 houses in Poland, Ukraine, Ecuador, USA, Brazil. 264 Sisters	ora et labora a balance between prayer and work including apostolic works, needlework, parish work
Benedictine sisters of Loretto	about 20 houses in Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Russia, Ukraine, Rumania, USA 201 Sisters	Passing on the written Word of God - running of a printing press, work with old people and children.
Benedictine sisters of Samaria		serving the poor cultivating Gregorian chant and the liturgy
Oblates	one village, 8 sisters and 200 oblates	The Benedictine charism for lay people
Immaculate Conception of Our Lady	9 monasteries, mostly founded in the 16 <sup>th</sup> century and expelled in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century 153 nuns	Liturgical prayer and handicrafts, baking of hosts and other typical works of contemplative Benedictines
Perpetual Adoration	3 monasteries 77 nuns	adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
Camaldolese	2 monasteries (one a new foundation) 25 nuns	a combination of community living and life as a hermit

### Benedictines in Eastern Europe

Since 1989 Benedictine life in Eastern Europe has reasserted itself. Individuals or even communities living underground during the communist regime are happy to return to normal monastic life as they knew it before the war, and to build up new contacts not possible at the time of the iron curtain. Abbess Ursula Schwalbe of Alexanderdorf near Berlin, (once in East Germany and part of the Soviet block,) was invited to this meeting as well as the abbesses of the two communities in Lithuania, Vilnius and Kaunas and the abbess of Żytomierz in Ukraine. This little group of guests represented one of the purposes of the CIB in a special way; that of bringing those monasteries that are isolated into contact with each other, and creating contacts which bring encouragement and growth. It was a unique opportunity for them to experience belonging to a world wide family of Benedictines, to meet the members of the Conference from all over the world as well as Abbot Primate, and also to make new contacts to Polish communities or to strengthen old friendships.



### Visit to Zarnowiec, September 12th - 15th

The monastery of Zarnowiec, built in the 13th century and with a history of Cistercian and Benedictine monastic life over the centuries, was on the program for the final days of the meeting.

There we were warmly welcomed by a community with varied backgrounds, the oldest sister being one of those expelled from Vilnius (then part of Poland, now Lithuania) after World War II and who came to Zarnowiec, filling the old, deserted monastery with new life in 1946.

The youngest sisters experienced the end of the soviet era as teenagers and used the new freedom to visit the countries of Western Europe and USA before returning to Poland and becoming Benedictines. The welcome of the community showed itself in prayer together in the new chapel, where many languages found their place, and where the musical talents of our hostesses served to make the celebration more festive. Their welcome showed itself in polish cooking, as tables were set up in the cloisters to serve the big invasion of guests. And their welcome showed itself in the joy and pride they showed in letting us experience some of the natural beauty of the coast and the cultural and historical riches of nearby Danzig. Great effort was put into the preparation of an inclusive liturgy which could be experienced by all as the still point at the centre, around which all else turned. They were telling us in their quiet, determined way, how much Polish Benedictines have to give to the world wide family of St. Benedict.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!



Our hostess,  
M. Jolanta Rzoska of Zarnowiec,  
President of the Congregation of the  
Immaculate Conception,  
who successfully brought together  
not only Benedictines from many  
different traditions in Poland, men  
and women, moniales and sorores,  
but also representatives of  
Benedictines from other East  
European countries, showing how  
solidarity amongst each other can be  
a source of inspiration and  
encouragement to all.



## **A Personal Impression of the Situation of Benedictine Life in Poland.**

The history of Poland is an important element in the understanding of monastic history in the country as well as the mentality of the people. There was a time of affluence in the Middle Ages, when beautiful churches and houses were built, filled with works of art of great value. The congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary originates mostly from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. At that time a part of Poland belonged to the Austrian Empire, which is evident in the magnificent architecture of some abbey churches. Most abbeys were dissolved during the secularisation which swept over Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some communities managed to stay together and moved west. After the Second World War practically all communities have some history of flight and poverty and a new start, often in old monastic buildings deserted some time before. Again and again we were reminded that one army after another ravaged the country and the land was divided up between the conquerors in different ways in different centuries, right up to the present time. The scars of the Second World War were everywhere to be seen. In the face of this history, religion was in many ways a help in preserving national identity. Our Lady, venerated in the icon of Tshenstockowa was declared the queen of Poland. Her motherly influence warmed the hearts of a people marked by suffering and made them strong in solidarity and perseverance. Increasing poverty and the breakdown of social structures led to the foundation of congregations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century devoted to the service of the poor. It is interesting to see how their founders clung to the idea of following the rule of St. Benedict as a source of spiritual nourishment in the demanding situation of their ministry. The networking and sense of solidarity between all men and women following the rule of St. Benedict seems to be a source of inspiration and encouragement to all, as well as providing a pool of resources, at a time when the Polish church is faced with new challenges through secularising influences from the west.

### Catalogus 2006

**Sr. Felicitas Seisenberger of Kommunität Venio, has agreed to take over the task of revising the Catalogus sororum et monialium, editio I, 2000. You will be hearing from her or from one of the delegates in the next few months asking for information about your community. It is hoped that the new Catalogus will be ready by September 2006.**

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