



# Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

www.benedictines-cib.org

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*CIB Conference West Africa 2011*

## *Editorial: S. Mary Jane Vergotz, CIB Secretary*

The CIB Conference met in West Africa from September 2<sup>nd</sup> to September 16<sup>th</sup>. Those in attendance included: S. Judith Ann Heble, Moderator; Abbot Primate Notker Wolf; M. Gian Paola Pederzoli, Region 1 Delegate representing Italy & Malta; M. Fabienne Hyon, Region 3 Delegate representing France & Israel; M. Zoë Davis, Administrative Council Member and Region 4 Delegate representing Great Britain & Ireland; M. Thérèse-Marie Dupagne, Assistant Moderator & Region 5 Delegate representing Benelux; M. Martyna Wysocka, Region 7 Delegate representing Poland; M. Anastazija Škunca, Region 8 Delegate representing Croatia; Sisters Christine Vladimiroff, Anne Shepard and Patricia Crowley, Region 9 Delegates representing the USA & Canada; M. Vania Maria Miranda Toscano de Brita, Region 11 Delegate representing Brazil; S. Mary John Mananzan, Administrative Council Member and Region 14 Delegate representing the Philippines; S. Kym Harris, representing Region 15 Oceania; M. Henriette Wêndbala Kalmogo, Region 17 Delegate

representing Central & West Africa & Madagascar; M. Metilda George, Administrative Council Member and Region 19 Delegate representing India; Prioress General Angela Strobel representing the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. S. Mary Jane Vergotz served as secretary and translators included S. Cristina Solaroli, Italy and Maja Kolega, Croatia.

The Conference Meeting was enhanced by the attendance of some of the Prioresses of Region 17, which includes Central and West Africa and Madagascar. Those attending as guests of the CIB included: S. Josephine Djufouo, Cameroun; M. Blandine-Marie Kuegah; S. Marie Fidegnon, Togo; S. Raphaël Verzaux, Guinée; S. Paul Galland, Côte d'Ivoire; S. Gabriel Rasoosola, Madagascar; and S. Marie Reine Hounsou, Benin.

The Sisters of West Africa expressed deep gratitude to the CIB delegates for their presence and expressions of solidarity, and to the "home" monasteries for supporting the goals of the CIB. The CIB Delegates were grateful for this opportunity to experience Benedictine Life in West Africa.

## *Happy Birthday, CIB!*

**S. Judith Ann Heble , CIB Moderator**

How very appropriate that the CIB Conference returned to the continent of its birth ten years ago. Though it has a forty-year pre-history of birthing pangs, the CIB was officially born on November 6, 2001, in Nairobi, Kenya. On September 8, 2011, the birthday celebration began with the Abbot Primate celebrating Mass with the Conference Delegates and the community of the Assumption in Dzogbégan, Togo, this time in West Africa. An afternoon picnic was planned near a lovely waterfall in Ghana. After a very long walking journey carrying the assortment of foods for a picnic, the Conference Delegates arrived at a gazebo in time for the sky to burst open with a downpour of rain. We sang “Happy Birthday” to the CIB and enjoyed a birthday cake made by the Sisters of Dzogbégan for the occasion.

Several of the Delegates who were present for this tenth anniversary celebration were also present when the CIB was officially named the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* in 2001. They can attest to the positive development of mutual support in the CIB over the past ten years. Holding the meeting of the Conference every second year in one of the Regions has greatly contributed to developing solidarity, not only among the Delegates, but with the communities of the Region as well.

In another ten years, what will the CIB look like? Hopefully, the bonds of sisterly love will be strengthened as we continue to find ways to support one another on this monastic journey.



*S. Judith Ann Heble , CIB Moderator, & S. Mary Jane Vergotz, CIB Secretaru show off their gifts from the communitu of Region 17.*



*CIB Birthday Cake*

**CIB NEWS:** *Video of the 2011 Conference Meeting go to [www.benedictines-cib.org](http://www.benedictines-cib.org)*

- The report given by Sister Mary Paul Galland, Region 17, Central & West Africa & Madagascar.
- Travel journal written by Sister Vania Maria Toscano, Region 11, Brazil
- Photo Albums
- Video (soon to be released)
- Excerpts from Fr. Louis' Conference

## *Welcome to the Village of Danyl Dzogbégan, Togo*

On September 7<sup>th</sup> the CIB Delegates attended a welcome gathering hosted by Emmanuel Detti, the Chief of the Village of Danyl Dzogbégan. Over 200 Villagers joined in the celebration with music, dance and refreshments.

### *Chief Detti addressed the gathering:*

“Honorable Reverend Father Notker Wolf, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation of Monks; your Excellency Reverend Mother Judith Ann Heble, Moderator of the Benedictine Confederation of Nuns and Sisters; representatives of different congregations from all over the World; distinguished guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great honor and privilege for me to have this speech on behalf of the District Executive Officer and on my own behalf to wish you a warm welcome to Togo as a whole and Danyl Dzogbégan in particular. In fact the whole population of Danyl Dzogbégan is enthusiastically happy with your arrival because you've chosen our small village for holding your annual conference. Ladies and gentlemen, obviously I'm not only filled with enthusiasm but also excited to express my profound gratitude for your coming here. I hope your visit here will give us the opportunity to express views with you for the well being and welfare of our community. It will not only strengthen but also reinforce the relationship between your respective communities and mine.

For the historical background of our sisters, I can't tell but all that I know is they have been with us here for more than forty years. Their spiritual background is beautifully remarkable. The assistance they usually give to the population and especially to women are always efficient and effective. We find their way of life very interesting.

Moreover I shall take this fine opportunity to invite you to join me in expressing my thanks to our Sisters here at this Monastery through their Abbess Blandine.



*Sr. Judith Ann Heble, OSB, CIB Moderator, Chief Atado, & Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, OSB*



*Chief Atado and Community member*

My grateful thanks will go to all those who make this unforgettable day successfully good. I'm totally sure and convinced that your rewards will be in heaven. May Almighty God bless you and the whole village. Feel yourselves at home.

Thank you.  
Emmanuel Detti  
Chief Atado



## *Visit to Monasteries in West Africa*

**S. Metilda George**

Tamil Nadu, India

The CIB gathering in West Africa began with the Administrative Council Meeting at Koubri Monastery in Burkina Faso. M. Henriette Wëndbala Kalmogo, Prioress, demonstrated their hospitality in a very touching manner by thoughtfully receiving us at the airport and attending to every detail of our needs during our stay. What was very striking was the Community Members radiating joy from the depths of their hearts which was so natural and made us feel one with them. The highlight was our meeting with the entire Community. We exchanged views in an interactive, spontaneous manner and were honored to receive their gifts. Each Administrative Council Member thoughtfully brought the soil of their respective Countries which was mixed with the soil of Burkina Faso during the opening prayer. The soil was given to M. Henriette who gracefully received it and assured us that it will be kept as a memento of our visit.

Our journey continued to Togo where we had a happy reunion with the other Delegates at the Conossian Sisters Convent at Lomé. The next morning, we traveled to Assumption Monastery in Dzogbégan. The serene, cool environment and the natural beauty of the place itself were very welcoming and conducive to our annual Delegate Meeting. The West African Benedictine Communities came together in an elegant manner and brought in a meaningful and reflective moment for introspection by arranging a procession with the CIB Banner and the statue of St. Benedict resting on a globe and carried by four African Sisters. This gesture was something unique, displaying African style and culture in welcoming the dignitaries. The Community displayed their hospitality through their drumming, dancing, and singing when they met us as a group and presented us with the gifts.

The peak moment of our stay at Assumption Monastery was our visit to the village. The Chief and the Villagers welcomed us with traditional African drumming, and dancing. The chief's speech reflected the acceptance of the Benedictine Communities in Dzogbégan and their dedicated service and their presence as a sign of inspiration.

What was notable in his speech was his recognition of the spiritual values for which our lives are dedicated. We indeed enjoyed the tam-tam dancing by the villagers.

During the concluding session of the Conference Meeting, there was a sudden outpour of heavy rain with thunder which brought the meeting to a close and it seemed as if it was an indication of showering of blessings by God on all present. The following day, we left to visit Monasteries in the north of Togo. Arriving at the Monastery of Incarnation at Sodari (a foundation of the Assumption Monastery,) after a long and tedious journey, was like coming to an Oasis in the Desert! The Community's presence in this part of the country where the majority is Muslim is a sure sign of Benedictine Hospitality to the people in the area. It is a focal point for the scattered Catholic Community to attend Sunday Mass regularly. In spite of all the struggles and hardships in establishing its foundation in Sodari, the Community shared its hospitality with fervor and generosity.

Our next stop-over was at the Conference Centre of "Our Lady of Hope" at Lanta in Benin. The very architecture of this Centre with an African style of cottages was picturesque and invited us to taste the African Hospitality. Fr. Louis Hondocodo, the Director of the Centre, received us with a joyful spirit. His manner of presenting the paper, "The African Woman" and exchanging views was vibrant.

The following day we proceeded to St. Joseph's Monastery in Toffo, Benin and on the way visited the Museum of the Kings in Agbomey. The welcome received and the accommodation provided by this Community was indeed comforting and relaxing. The Monastery was beautiful with its symbolic carvings of the tabernacle and the chapel doors depicting various events of the Old and New Testaments. They serve as clear expressions of the Benedictine rootedness in the Scriptures. The architectural beauty of the Chapel has left in us a lasting memory.



*M. Metilda George, India (left), M. Fabienne Hyon, France (back right) & S. Mary John Mananzan, Philippines (front right)*

## *Visit to Monasteries-West Africa continued.*

On the next day the Bishop of the Diocese made a courtesy visit and celebrated the Mass for us. His speech prepared our minds for our next visit to Quidah, which was the culmination of our short stay in West Africa. The various steps at Quidah before reaching the No Entrance Gate enabled us to enter into the sentiments of those who suffered during the slave trade.

During our long journeys throughout these Countries, the notable feature one can recall is the children beaming with joy and happiness running towards our passing vehicle, cheerfully waving out to us expressing their friendliness and welcoming spirit.

Hospitality that reigned in the different countries during colonialism enabled the Colonialists to overpower them. In Quidah, the “Point No Return” arch stands as a sign, but the new “Door of Return” erected in year 2000, conveys the hope that West Africa does not lack in hospitality and shows forth their nobility in welcoming all with open arms. The experience of our short stay merely exemplifies that the painful past is overcome by the new dawn of return.



Tour of the Chapel in Dzoghégan



M. Martyna Wysocka, Poland and CIB Delegates-Pilgrimage to West Africa

## *Pilgrimage to West Africa*

**M. Martyna Wysocka**  
Otwock, Poland

I am very happy that I could participate in the CIB Conference Meeting in Togo and Benin. It was a wonderful experience to be able to see how Sisters live in different cultures, how they pray and worship God, and how they work according to the Rule of Saint Benedict. I was fascinated with the beauty of the Liturgy, especially the singing, their great respect for the Sacred, and their simplicity of life.

Personally, I was moved with the visit to Ouidah in Benin, the place which commemorates tragic events from the history of the people living there. I am grateful to the Sisters who organized our visit for including this site in the itinerary of our visit to Africa. The subject of our meeting "Solidarity, Authenticity, Respect" (the 2010-2014 CIB Goals), were explored in our Conference Meetings and throughout our visits to the various Monasteries and sites in West Africa. These discussions had special meaning for me: unity in diversity; joy of being together with the Delegates and Sisters from West African Communities; sharing with words and experience; and worshipping God together. All these gave me wings in my pilgrimage and service. I appreciate this encounter, which strengthens our bonds as Benedictine Women.

## *The Experience in West Africa of Common Prayer*

**S. Anne Shepard, OSB**

Atchison, Kansas USA

Saint Benedict instructs us to approach prayer with humility and respect. God, he insists, will regard our purity of heart and tears of compunction (RB 20). Without a doubt the Liturgy of the Hours and the eucharistic celebrations in West Africa were prayed with a humble and pure tone.

The monasteries of Benedictine women and men that we visited in West Africa chant the Divine Office in French. Some of us who know the language were able to follow and participate with some ease. The praying of the Liturgy of the Hours was as beautiful as I have experienced. The cantors and the choir were of one voice, soft and on perfect pitch, so it seemed. The instruments that they used, the twenty-one-stringed *kora*, the *agogo* and *kilamba* bells, the wooden xylophone called a *balafon* and multiple drums enriched the musical quality without being too loud or distracting.

We traveled to a number of places in buses. Since it took so long for us to load suitcases, we had to have the bags ready by four thirty in the morning so we could leave by five thirty. Given the early hour of rising, eating and preparing to go, we decided to pray Lauds on the bus. English Abbess Zoe Davis prepared worship aids and together we praised God as we bumped along the dirt roads, squinting as the sun greeted us and chanting a line from the familiar Taize song, "Bonum est confidere in Domino, bonum sperare in Domino."

The liturgical highlight for us was the Sunday Eucharist celebrated at Ascension Monastery with members of the parish and town in attendance. For the first time in my life, I understood the gospel line from the story of the loaves and fishes: "they numbered four thousand, not including women and children." The church was packed with many children of all ages. Members of the youth club led the presider and the altar servers in as they danced and sang. Another group presented the Sunday Lectionary in procession, with one woman carrying the book on her head. Still others processed to the altar as they brought the gifts of bread, wine and fruits of the land. Throughout the liturgy we witnessed little children moving to the beat of drums. The entire congregation sang fully. For the closing, everyone was invited to dance and most

did. The African sisters added to the festivities as they led the dancing, which lasted for about fifteen minutes. It was quite a celebration of the Body of Christ. The joy was tangible.

Our days together were not what I would call vacation days. We did not leave Africa yearning to return to our monastery prayer because we had been devoid of the richness of the Opus Dei. Rather, we came back grateful that the West African liturgical experiences nourished us and invited us to be at home with our familiar prayer forms. West African melodies resonate in our hearts and in our whistles. A smile appears when we remember the liturgical movement that is not at all as reserved as ours in the Americas. Bowing reverently, we realize that God is coming to our assistance and making haste to help us wherever we are.



*S. Marie Fidegnon, Togo &  
S. Anne Shepard, USA*



*M Gian Paola Pederzoli, Italy  
holds the CIB Candle*



## Conference News

### *Building Solidarity*

#### *In Solidarity with the Sisters in Region 17: Central and West Africa and Madagascar*

On September 15, 2011 the CIB Conference Members adopted a resolution in solidarity with the Sisters in Region 17.

**Resolution:** On the feast day of each monastery in Region 17 (Central and West Africa and Madagascar) the monasteries of the CIB will offer their prayers at the Divine Office and the Eucharist for the respective Monastery.

Other options that can be considered by the individual communities include:

- Arranging for S. Marie Fidegnon, Dzogbégan, Togo, to send some antiphons from their Divine Office to the CIB Secretary for distribution to the CIB Delegates. The antiphons would be available for use in the monasteries when deemed appropriate. (Antiphons are published in French).
- An exchange of Sisters between the monasteries of Region 17 and any other Benedictine Monastery in the world--and vice versa for the following possible objectives:
  - Sisters to teach English to the French-s peaking Sisters of Region 17.
  - Cultural or educational visits.
- Monetary contributions.
- Exchange of newsletters



*Dzogbégan Villagers*



*CIB West African Banner*



*Banner Presentation*

## **CIB CALENDAR**

### **2012**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>January</b>         | <b>Israel</b>  |
| <b>January 13-23</b>   | <b>Meeting of the CIB Administrative Council</b>   |
| <b>September</b>       | <b>Italy</b>   |
|                        | <b>San Benedetto in Valledaqua, near<br/>Aguasanta Terme, Ascoli Piceno</b>              |
| <b>September 10</b>    | <b>Arrival of CIB Administrative Council</b>   |
| <b>September 11</b>    | <b>Meeting of the CIB Administrative Council<br/>Arrival of CIB Conference Delegates</b> |
| <b>September 12-14</b> | <b>Meeting of the CIB Conference</b>   |
| <b>September 15</b>    | <b>Departure for Rome</b>  |
| <b>September 17-26</b> | <b>Rome<br/>Congress of Abbots</b>   |
| <b>September 26</b>    | <b>Departures</b>  |

### **2013**

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>January</b>            | <b>England</b>   |
| <b>January 15-23</b>      | <b>Meeting of the CIB Administrative Council</b>                                     |
| <b>September</b>          | <b>Brazil</b>  |
| <b>September 2</b>        | <b>Arrival of CIB Administrative Council</b>   |
| <b>September 3</b>        | <b>Arrival of CIB Conference Delegates<br/>Meeting of CIB Administrative Council</b> |
| <b>September 4, 6,8</b>   | <b>Meeting of the CIB Conference</b>   |
| <b>September 15 or 16</b> | <b>Departures</b>  |

### **2014**

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>January</b>         | <b>Rome</b>   |
| <b>January 14-16</b>   | <b>Meeting of the CIB Administrative Council &amp;<br/>Symposium planners</b>             |
| <b>September</b>       | <b>Sant'Anselmo, Rome</b>   |
| <b>September 3-6</b>   | <b>Arrival of Staff &amp; Symposium Planning<br/>Committee</b>                            |
| <b>September 7</b>     | <b>Arrival of CIB Administrative Council<br/>First arrivals of Symposium participants</b> |
| <b>September 8</b>     | <b>Meeting of CIB Administrative Council<br/>Arrival of Symposium Participants</b>        |
| <b>September 9</b>     | <b>Meeting of CIB Conference<br/>Optional Trip to Monte Cassino &amp; Subiaco</b>         |
| <b>September 10-17</b> | <b>CIB Symposium</b>  |
| <b>September 18</b>    | <b>Morning – Meeting of CIB Conference<br/>Afternoon – Meeting of CIB Admin. Council</b>  |
| <b>September 19</b>    | <b>Departure of CIB Administrative Council<br/>and Conference</b>                         |
| <b>September 20</b>    | <b>Departure of Symposium Planning<br/>Committee</b>                                      |