



Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

www.benedictines-cib.org

Newsletter #11

2015 CIB Conference Meeting

For the past two years, our Sisters in France, Region 3, have been planning for the meeting of the CIB Conference, September 8-23, 2015. And plan they did, making it possible for us to visit nine different communities! All of the details of such an experience were carefully orchestrated by the Delegate of Region 3, Mother Marie-Caroline Lecouffe.

Our “home base” was Notre-Dame de Jouarre Abbey where a lovely guest house accommodated us all. We experienced the hospitality of the community in so many ways: their beautiful liturgies, dinner with the community, tours of the Abbey, the gift shop, the medieval tower, the Merovingian Crypt – the burial place of some of the early abbesses. The nuns of Jouarre took the time to prepare books for us with the psalms and readings in both English and French. The abbey was a perfect location for our meetings and had a comfortable meeting room to accommodate us and the many abbesses and prioresses that came to meet us. Early on, we had the occasion to experience the history of the communities in France through a power-point presentation prepared by Sister Bertille Lesur of the Bénédictines de Jésus Crucifié, Brou sur Chantereine, France.

We were welcomed to the annual meeting of the CIB Conference by the Abbot Primate who once again challenged us to be communities that are alive and welcoming and spiritually rooted. The Administrative Council prepared meaningful prayer and lectio sharing experiences, enabling us to share deeply with one another on the themes of our goals for the next four years: solidarity, peace and reverence for God’s people and creation.

When we met groups of abbesses and prioresses, we prayed together and introduced our communities to one another using photos of our community members, chapel, and a work in which we are engaged. We ended each gathering with a blessing for those who came to be with us from various parts of France.

The Administrative Council arranged for Abbot Richard Yeo to meet with them regarding the follow-up to the Symposium question, as to whether or not the CIB should pursue becoming a canonical entity. Sister Scholastika Häring and Sister Lynn McKenzie, both canonists, were present for this session and gave a report of this meeting to the CIB Conference. Simply stated, Abbot Richard advised us to wait. This spurred another topic in which both the Abbot Primate and Abbot Richard urged us to communicate to our regions the importance to communities of planning to form congregations.



(Le\$ to Right) Row 1: M.M Bonaventure Shabala, M. Marie---Caroline Lecouffe, M. Columba Salinas. Row 2: M. Franziska Lukas, S. Veronica Hoey, S. Judith Ann Heble. Row 3: M. M. Araceli Escurzon, M. Martha Lúcia Ribeiro Teixeira, M. MeQlda George. Row 4: S. Antje Eichhorn---Eugen, front: S. Lynn---Marie McKenzie, M. Andrea Savage, S. Patricia Crowley, M. Thérèse---Marie Dupagne.



Meeting at Le Bec Hellouin



Meeting in Jouarre



Meeting in Jouarre



M. Marie-Madeleine Caseau & S. Judith Ann at celebration in Vanves

The CIB Conference dealt with a process to establish a theme for the 2018 CIB Symposium. We were also notified at this meeting that the Planning Committee for the election of the next Abbot Primate at the Abbots' Congress in September, 2016, asked the CIB (along with the Presidents of the Congregations of monks) to present what they believe are the challenges the next Abbot Primate will face and the qualities that the next Abbot Primate should possess.

September 12-13th we journeyed to LeBec, France, the location of dual communities of nuns and monks. Prioress Marie-Placide Cazenave welcomed us to her monastery, Sainte Françoise-Romaine Monastery, where we met a number of abbesses and prioresses from northeast France. We were privileged to meet and hear Msgr. Stanislas Lalanne, Bishop of Pontoise. He presented a lecture on "The Church of France" – and the many challenges it faces.

Our time in Le Bec included a tour of the Notre-Dame du Bec Abbey, where we were welcomed by Abbot Paul-Emmanuel M. Clenet and celebrated Mass followed by a delightful dinner with the two communities.

On our way back to Jouarre, we stopped in Paris to tour Notre Dame Cathedral and attend Vespers there with hundreds of other tourists.

On September 14th, we had a day with the Abbesses and Prioresses of North-East France. Mère Marie-Noëlle Etchelet, prioress of Monastère Sainte-Scholastique in Urt, France spoke on monasticism in France and the challenges facing Benedictine women today. Soeur Marie-Laure of the Community of Jerusalem in Paris and Soeur Mireille Golliez, prioress general of the Protestant deaconesses of Reuilly à Versailles, described recent efforts to live monastic life.

We had a holiday on Sunday, September 15th to go to Paris. We briefly toured the Collège des Bernadines, a 13th century Cistercian college and the Montmartre, Sacré-Coeur Basilica. The Foundation des Monastères – which supports all Benedictine communities in France – hosted a lunch at their offices. After being properly refreshed, we all boarded the train to our destination, a cruise on the Seine River with an amazing view of the skyline of Paris – including the Eifel Tower.

We then traveled to Vanves for Vespers and Mass at the Sainte-Bathilde Monastery. We were warmly welcomed by Mere Marie-Madeleine Caseau to a delicious dinner prepared by this international community. Vanves is the location of the AIM office. Of course, Sister Gisela Happ was happy that we were able to see where she has spent many years working for our communities throughout the world.

From September 17-20th, our home-base was Sainte-Croix Abbey in Sainte-Benoît, near Poitiers, France. The little community of Sainte-Croix was most hospitable, even providing us with booklets prepared for the Liturgy of the Hours in both English and French.



Abbot Jean-Pierre Longeat
& M. Fabienne Hyon

Abbot Jean-Pierre Longeat of Ligugé and Mère Fabienne Hyon of the Monastère des Bénédictines of Sainte Bathilde, Saint-Thierry, France, spoke on the international connections of French monasteries in other countries. Here, too, we gathered with the Abbesses and Prioresses of nearby communities.

Mère Marie Mühlethaler, president of the Benedictines of Notre-Dame du Calvaire, provided a presentation on the community on Mount Olivet in Jerusalem, urging us to send Sisters there to keep the monastery vigorous. Mère Françoise-Noël Fleurbayx, Prioress General of the Regina Apostolorum Congregation, gave us an update on the status of the community in Bethlehem.

After fifteen years, I had the good fortune to re-connect with Mère Martina Ravallault, abbess emerita of Sainte-Croix. Mère Martina was an appointed delegate, then representing France even before there was a CIB. Mère Martina gave us an inspiring presentation on the history of St. Radegunde and later took us on a tour of Poitiers where we were able to pray before the tomb of St. Radegunde and to visit other ancient Churches.

At Solesmes, we were admitted to the cloister of the Abbey of Sainte-Cécile. Both Abbess Clara de Sazilly and Abbot Philippe Dupont of Saint-Pierre Abbey welcomed us. We celebrated Holy Mass with the community after which one of the nuns gave us an interesting presentation on the role of Dom Prosper Guéranger and his influence on the formation of the Abbess Cécile Bruyere and the foundation of the nuns' community in 1866. In the floor of the Abbey Church is a small tomb containing his heart. It is recorded that he said, "Leave my heart with the Sisters".

After a meal with the community, we joined the formal procession to the Church for None. We then met the community and each of the CIB Delegates introduced herself. I again met someone from some years ago, the former Abbess of Solesmes, Mère Marie-Bernadette de Maigret, abbess here for some 30 years. Ten years ago, I attended a meeting of the French abbesses and prioresses in Pradines, where I met her. It was a most pleasant encounter once again.

We walked to Sainte-Pierre Abbey, Solesmes, where one of the monks gave us a presentation on the evolution of Gregorian Chant. We even had a short practice session to ready us for Vespers. Another monk gave us a most informative tour of the beautiful sculptures outside the abbey church. We then joined the monks for Vespers and experienced first-hand their rendering of Gregorian Chant.

In close proximity to Sainte-Croix, is Saint-Martin Abbey in Ligugé, France. We joined the community of monks and a large number of lay people for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. One of the monks then gave us a tour of the archaeological ruins of this ancient abbey, originally founded in



Abbess Clara de Sazilly welcomes S.
Judith Ann & M. Marie-Caroline to

361 by St. Martin of Tour on a site offered by the Bishop, St. Hilary of Poitiers. Abbot Jean-Pierre Longeat joined us in one of the guest houses for a splendid dinner. Abbot Jean-Pierre who is currently the President of AIM gave us an insightful report on the current activities of AIM.



M. Martina Ravailault of Sainte Croix & S. Judith Ann

The CIB is greatly indebted to AIM for making it possible for those who are in need of financial assistance to be able to attend the different meetings of the CIB.

On September 21st, the final part of our journey took us to two other communities, one of monks and one of nuns, at Saint Benoît Abbey of Fleury, in Sant-Benoît-sur-Loire, France, founded in 630. In 1067, a crypt was built in the basilica to accommodate the remains of St. Benedict, reputed to have been transferred there from Montecassino in 672. We had sufficient time for quiet reflection and prayer for all of our Benedictine sisters and brothers. After Vespers with the monastic community of monks, we were welcomed by Abbot Étienne Ricaud to a festive dinner. The Subiaco Congregation of the English province was holding their meeting in Fleury and we met many other abbesses, prioresses, abbots and

priors from other parts of the world. A truly delightful evening! Half of us stayed the night in Fleury while the others traveled a short distance to Monastère Notre-Dame in Bouzy-la-Forêt, France, where Mother Marie-Caroline Lecouffe is prioress. This small community saw to our every need. After a delightful lunch including many French delicacies, it was time to say au revoir.

The CIB held its closing ritual of prayer including the passing of the CIB candle to Region I (Italy) who will be hosting the next meeting. We returned to Jouarre where we made ready for departures to our countries on September 23rd, but not before the warm final farewells to the community at Jouarre.

Many memories remain with me of this time in Region 3. One in particular is the noticeable prayerfulness of the communities we visited. The beauty of their liturgies had to come after much time devoted to practicing to make sure their hearts were in harmony with their voices.

These ancient monastic communities are a testimony to the meaning of persistence and resolve. After untold disasters in the Region – from the French Revolution through World War I and II, the nuns here have rebuilt their lives. The challenges they currently face seem slight in comparison to the untold suffering, dispossession and displacement they have experienced in their lifetime. May the blood of their martyrs serve to make the soil fertile once again for the renewal of monastic life in France.



**M. Marie-Caroline, S. Judith Ann
& A.P. Notker Wolf**

How does one thank all of those who made this memorable experience possible? First of all, I wish to thank Mother Marie-Caroline Lecouffe for coordinating everything to the smallest detail with all of the other communities in France. I wondered through it all if at one time in her life she had been a “girl scout” leader! We also could not have done without Sister Antje Eichhorn-Eugen of Abtei Scholastika, Dinklage, Germany, for being such a clear and wonderful translator for all of us. Both of these women deserve a long and restful holiday!

MERCI BEAUCOUP!

S. Judith Ann Heble, Moderator

Numbers 6:22-27:

May God bless and keep you. May God's face shine on you. May God be kind to you and give you peace.



CONGREGATION OF BENEDICTINE SISTERS
OF
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01 October 2015

Dear Sister Mary Jane Vergotz

Greetings from South Africa. We are enjoying Springs Season, but it is more like Summer because of high temperature, though there is yet very minimal rain. I found my Community well and sound from the CIB conference meeting.

It had been very edifying for me to attend the CIB meeting as a delegate. I enjoyed my stay in France. I was so much impressed to see that there are many Sacred places in France. Monastic history touched me to a highest degree. Yes, I have learnt about the French Revolution and World Wars at school, but it never crossed my mind the extent of their effects in the Church and Monasteries. A new page was opened in my mind.

I was very pleased to get to know all the delegates and/ or substitutes that were there. Each of you have made tremendous impact on me, and I am looking forward to our next encounter. When I arrived in South African airport on the 24th September it was Heritage Day, which I had forgotten about. I was reminded when I saw people in traditional attire and dancing traditionally. On Sunday our learners who stay in our boarding homes were wearing traditionally to Holy Mass and at the end of the Celebration we all sang the National Anthem, "Nkosi sikelela iAfrika", which means God bless Africa..

We stay in a rural area, the farm, where our life depends on rain for planting our fields and gardens, and for our livestock to get fresh grass. These months we are faced with drought. It means that things are not good for us. We generally have a problem of scarce water because we use bore-holes to draw it from the ground into the tanks.

My email has got a problem at present, but as soon as it becomes good, we'll communicate much easier through it.

I wish you and your community all the best.

Yours in Christ and St. Benedict

Sr. M. Bonaventure Tshabalala, OSB



My First Impressions of the CIB in France



Every two years the CIB Delegates Conference is hosted in one of the 19 regions. This year we were given a big welcome in France.

An important reason why we meet in many different countries is the opportunity to encounter the superiors of the Benedictine monasteries near the places where we are staying. In France there were 4 meetings of this kind.

I was very much impressed by the efforts which were made by the abbesses and prioress of the communities to come to the different places. In this way it was possible for our international group to become better known and we have a chance to get to know at least someone from each community.

The encounter is a joyful opportunity to share the different charism of each community, of each region and the special circumstances the nuns and sisters are living in. These encounters are all well prepared. Everybody was asked to bring photos: one each of the community, the monastery or location, the chapel and the community's work or ministry. Sitting in mixed groups and telling each other the story and situation in which the communities are living, these photos helped us to become better acquainted with one another.

At the end of each of these meetings there is always the question: how can we express solidarity and stay in communion with each other? This is an important question for building up a network between our communities from France to Japan and from Sweden to South Africa.

This year we had also a special meeting in Jouarre, the monastery which was our base during the different excursions. On the afternoon of the 14th of September we were invited to listen to three talks which were given at a roundtable from Prioress Marie-Noëlle Etchelet, Urt, Prioress Sr. Mireille Golliez, Diaconisse of Reuilly and Sr. Marie Laure from the Jerusalem Community in Paris. The topic they spoke about was: "The challenges of the woman Benedictine order in France". In our discussion afterwards we picked up that challenge which seemed most interesting for us: monastic life is a possibility of resistance in our society today:

- * Rhythm (rather than slowness) understood as the opposite of the hectic pace of our times.
- * to live a simple lifestyle, not to have more and more and more
- * against sadness and isolation, we try to find a balance between the individual and community
- * solidarity rather than autonomy.

All in all: we seek God by remembering that God is seeking us!

It was as every time a great experience for building up a sisterly bond, one of the aims of the CIB. Thank you very much, dear Abbess and Prioress, for giving us a warm welcome!

*M. Franziska Lukas
Delegate Region 6*

CIB CALENDAR**January Montserrat, Spain****January 20-22
Meeting of the
CIB Administrative Council****August/September
Assisi and Rome, Italy****Aug. 30 – Arrival CIB
Administrative Council, Assisi****Aug. 31 – Meeting of CIB
Administrative Council
Arrival of CIB Conference, Assisi****Sept. 1, 2, 3 – Meetings of
CIB Conference
Sept. 4 – Free Day****Sept. 5 – Depart for Rome****Sept. 6 – 9:00 a.m.
Congress of Abbots begins.****Sept. 16 – 1:00 p.m. – Congress
of Abbots ends. Departures****TBD - Meeting of the CIB
Administrative Council with
Abbot Primate.****2017 September 5-20
South Korea****** Exact dates of the meetings
of the CIB Administrative****Council / Conference will be
sent to you as soon as plans are
in final form.****2018 January TBD
Meeting of
CIB Administrative Council*****My First CIB Meeting***

It was a beautiful experience. I had left with some fears as, with my scant knowledge of English, I thought I would not be able to participate fully. But soon my apprehensions vanished as we were lucky to have an excellent translator, S. Antje Eichhorn-Eugen.



**M. Francoise-Noel, M. Therese -
Marie & M. Marie-Caroline**

These days were a great enrichment thanks to the balance between lectures, discussion in small groups and with the entire group, the discovery of a number of French monasteries and getting to know the members of a variety of communities. Approaches of the Church of France with Bishop Lalanne, the bishop of Pontoise (near Paris), the challenges of feminine Benedictine monasticism in France with M. Marie-Noëlle, the prioress of Urt, and the presentation and discussion of the Encyclical *Laudato si'* with M. Metilda, the prioress of Tiruvannamalai (India), provided insights concerning what the Church and religious communities are confronted with in France, the country we were visiting this year.

The Abbot Primate and Sr Scholastika of Dinklage shared their thinking and researches about Benedictine life in its organization, Congregations, Federations, the history of the CIB, women's status..., whereas Fr. Jean-Pierre Longeat, President of AIM, gave a general survey of monasteries throughout the world.

I enjoyed this sharing with sisters from different continents who live realities different from mine. I enjoyed the privileged contacts with the brothers and sisters of the monasteries we visited. During our working days I greatly appreciated the times of prayer and participating in the liturgy of the communities, I admired the good organization of these days and from the bottom of my heart I thank all those whose part was instrumental in the success of these encounters.

I felt how much we are one big Benedictine family, even if habits, traditions, and exterior aspects differ the Lord and St Benedict make our unity and one same joy inhabits us! All this I knew before, but it is good to live it concretely on the occasion of these encounters. I am most grateful for the opportunity to participate in this Conference Meeting.

*M. Françoise-Noël Fleurbayx
Substitute for Co-opted Delegate*

Sainte Françoise Romaine Monastery



S. Patricia Crowley & S. Mary Jane Vergotz
Enjoy Sunday in Ligugé

At Bec le Helloun, we visited two monasteries situated in the idyllic French countryside and we began to decipher and to expand our experiences of French monasticism and the French Church. Listening to a French bishop speak of the challenges he faces in his diocese, we began to realize the complexities and impact of the separation of church and state as well as the revolutionary spirit of *Liberte, fraternite, and egalite* still affecting 20th century ecclesial realities.

There, in a very traditional setting on a peaceful day on September 12th Stanislas Lalanne, bishop of Pontoise, spoke with refreshing honesty of the need to understand Islam, to respond to the current refugee crises, to share leadership roles, to evangelize in brand new ways, and to be very pastoral, especially with the youth. Our session on the French church ended in a dialogue regarding the need for a new paradigm in humanity's search for God, a paradigm that recognizes societal trends and people's needs as well as the basic sense that Christianity in its gospel form is essentially relational. In that spirit, the CIB delegates spent the afternoon sharing our communities in groups of four with ten or so French prioresses. We found ourselves, once again, heartened by the similarities in our Benedictine spirit as lived out in so very many different ways across the world.

Patricia Crowley, O.S.B.
Region 9 Delegate

Available on the CIB Website: www.benedic7nes---cib.org
2014 CIB Catalogus order form at the cost of €25 including postage.

Presenta7ons from the 2015 CIB Conference Mee7ng in France:

"The Challenges of the Women Benedic7ne Order in France."
M. Marie-Noëlle Etchelet

September 14, 2015

"The Different Forms of Monas7c Life in France and their Links with Foreign Countries."

A.Jean Pierre Longeat