

Address of the Abbot Primate to the Holy Father at the Audience of 8 September 2016

Holy Father,

Warm greetings and sincere thanks to you for our joy in welcoming us today, we abbots and conventual priors together with representatives of the Benedictines from throughout the world. We also have with us guests from the Eastern Churches and an Anglican representative who are very close to our hearts. Every four years, the superiors meet in Rome for the Congress of Abbots. Among other things, we discuss the current situation of our monasteries, the formation of young people, continuing education, and the situation of our Athenaeum and College of Sant'Anselmo.

We represent 7,000 monks, while our nuns and sisters number 14,000. With regard to the nuns, we thank you for your Apostolic Constitution "*Dei Vultum quaerere*". The nuns feel very encouraged. We do not live in strong times, but we are not pessimistic. There are some vocations, with the situation changing from culture to culture. We are aware that beyond the celebration of the liturgy, there is need for the revitalization of community life. Therefore, our communities have welcomed heartily your challenge of mercy and are transmitting it during days of study across a broader setting.

Our monasteries are involved in a multitude of activities, and I would like to mention only a few events: Due to the needs generated by current migration, quite a number of monasteries especially in Germany and Austria have welcomed refugees within their walls.

In our schools, we form 160,000 students. An international commission oversees the Benedictine profile of education. This year, we welcomed 170 professors to Rome from 21 countries to reflect together on the theme of leadership in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

In your letter to the religious, you asked for monks to develop interreligious dialogue. We have been doing so since 1979 with Zen Buddhists, and for some years with Muslims as well. We are not the organizers of grand events, but we welcome our partners to our monasteries, and we are greeted in their sacred places. In the meantime, bonds of deep friendship have grown. Saint Benedict has told us to welcome all guests as Christ (RB 53.1).

Finally, I would like humbly to ask for your prayers and for your special blessing, because in a few days we will elect a new abbot primate. After 16 years of service to the Confederation and to Sant'Anselmo, I am leaving these responsibilities to one younger than I. On our part, we promise you our continued prayers for you and your responsibilities. We are very grateful for the guidance you have given us and will continue to give us. May God bless you!

Notker Wolf, O.S.B.

Abbot Primate