

REPORT OF THE *COMMUNIO INTERNATIONALIS BENEDICTINARUM*
Congress of Abbots, September 14, 2016
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Good morning Abbot Primate, brother Abbots, Abbesses and Prioresses – Delegates of the CIB. Much has happened in the CIB since the last report that I gave to you four years ago. On behalf of the CIB, I wish to thank you for inviting us to be part of this Congress. We were most pleased to be included in some of the planning for the Congress by way of submitting our ideas regarding the challenges, qualities and ways that the Benedictine women can assist the next Abbot Primate.

I would like to give a brief explanation of the internal workings of the CIB. The CIB brings together in a sisterly bond all women's communities consociated with the Benedictine Confederation. As of the 2014 *Catalogus*, we number some 14,000 Nuns and Sisters. I know that you will want a copy of the latest edition of our *Catalogus*. You can find it on the CIB website: www.benedictines-cib.org. While you are at this Congress, our *Catalogus* is being sold in the cloister at the discount rate of only €25. Such a bargain! Get your copy now!

The CIB has the world divided into nineteen regions. Each Region elects a Delegate to what is called the Conference of the CIB. Region 9, USA and Canada, has three Delegates. There is also one co-opted Delegate who represents an international Congregation and an Observer from AIM. With the Moderator, there are a total of twenty-four Delegates to the Conference of the CIB. This Conference meets once a year, usually in the Fall. An Administrative Council of no more than six members has been meeting twice a year under the leadership of the Moderator. The Administrative Council and the Conference of the CIB just finished our meetings in Assisi before coming here for the Congress.

Every other year, the CIB Conference meets in Rome in conjunction with the meeting of the Congress of Abbots and in the year of the CIB Symposium. In the alternating years, we try to meet in one of the nineteen Regions to gain a deeper appreciation of the richness and varied expression of women's monastic life. The Conference has already met in ten Regions. The Administrative Council has had the additional opportunity to meet in five Regions. Communities have been most gracious in offering the hospitality of their Region as the site of a meeting.

A highlight during the past four years was our 7th International Symposium for Benedictine Women – held at Sant'Anselmo, September 10-17, 2014. The theme of this Symposium was **LISTEN...with the ear of your heart. Prol. 1.**

We had three approaches to the topic:

1. Listening to God.

Listening was examined from the perspective of the Old and New Testaments. The presenter for this session was Dr. Maria Pina Scanu a Scripture professor at Sant'Anselmo.

2. Listening in the Rule of St. Benedict.

This session focused on St. Benedict's challenge to develop the art of listening with the ear of our hearts. Sister Aquinata Böckmann was the presenter on this topic.

3. Listening to the signs of the times.

To what is this time and our place in the world and Church calling us? How might we respond as monastic women? Sister Mary John Mananzan was the presenter.

Also during our 2014 Symposium, we had occasion to hear of the progress Sister Scholastika Häring, Dinklage, Germany was making on her dissertation, a study on the juridical development of the relationship between the communities of Benedictine women among each other and with the *Confoederatio Benedictina*. Those of us present could attest to the remarkable job she had done on this most valuable historical document. I am pleased to announce that her dissertation was accepted and she now holds a doctorate in Canon Law. Sister Scholastika is now working on having her dissertation published in German. For the benefit of many more of us, we will have the book translated into English and published as well. You most likely will want a copy for your own purposes or archives.

On April 29, 2014, some communities of *moniales* received a letter and questionnaire from the Holy See sent to those "who live the wholly contemplative and cloistered life." It was issued to coincide with Pope Francis' declaration of the YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE beginning on November 30, 2014 and ending on February 2, 2016. During this year of Consecrated Life, there has to be the revision and development of some important documents related to consecrated life, specifically the 1950 document, *SPONSA CHRISTI*. The Holy Father gave the *Congregatio pro Institutis Vitae Consecratae et Societatibus Vitae Apostolicae* a mandate to continue the development of a new instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns to update or replace the legislation presently in force, issued by the Congregation in the Instruction *Verbi Sponsa*, May 13, 1999.

The contemplative nuns from around the world were to submit their thoughts and suggestions to the Vatican questionnaire on these topics by the end of September, 2014. Needless to say, there were a number of concerns expressed by the Benedictine *moniales* and *sorores* as this coincided with our Symposium. Sister Scholastika Häring was most helpful in outlining the issues of the topic of enclosure to both the CIB Conference and the participants attending the Symposium.

On September 13, 2014, three *moniales* and one representing the *sorores* went to the Vatican and met with Monsignor Pepe Orazio of the Sacred Congregation to express

their concerns and to offer the necessary clarifications regarding Benedictine enclosure as distinct from that lived by members of other contemplative Orders.

On September 18, 2014, the CIB Conference unanimously agreed to send a statement on behalf of the CIB to the Congregation outlining the clarifications of who we are as Benedictine women, both *moniales* and *sorores*, and recommending that the Congregation consider sponsoring some type of forum so that all of the major orders of contemplative nuns could provide input on and clarification of their respective charisms before legislation is updated and put into effect for all. The Abbot Primate gave his approval to our statement.

As a result of all of this discussion, some of the participants at the Symposium felt that the CIB is at a point now in its fifteen years of existence, to begin looking at a juridical structure so as to give the CIB some further identity as an official organization in the Church. To follow up on this, last September the CIB Administrative Council invited Abbot Richard Yeo to our meeting in France to share his thoughts with us on whether or not there is a possibility to have some type of juridical structure. His advice at the time was to “wait” as the Holy See had yet to respond to the questionnaire. On July 22, 2016, the Vatican responded with the Apostolic Constitution, *Vultum Dei Quaere*, on Women’s Contemplative Life. Sister Scholastika Häring and Sister Lynn McKenzie, both canonists, spent time with the CIB Delegates discussing the implications of the document.

At this same meeting of the CIB Administrative Council last September, both Abbot Richard Yeo and the Abbot Primate urged us to communicate to our Regions the importance of working toward forming monastic congregations of monasteries of nuns. In some Regions, those discussions are already taking place.

At the conclusion of the Symposium, the Delegates of the Conference held elections for a Moderator, Assistant Moderator and two members for the Administrative Council. I was re-elected to another four-year term as Moderator. Mother Thérèse Marie Dupagne of Belgium was elected as Assistant Moderator. Mother Metilda George of India and Mother Franziska Lukas of Dinklage, Germany were elected to the Administrative Council. Two additional members were appointed to the Administrative Council, namely, Mother Araceli Escurzon of the Philippines and Mother Martha Lúcia Ribeiro Teixeira of Brazil. As you can see, the six Administrative Council members represent different forms of Benedictine life and different regions of the world. Sister Mary Jane Vergotz and Sister Linda Romey, both of Erie, Pennsylvania, are the Secretary and Treasurer of the CIB respectively.

At the meetings of the CIB Conference before and after the Symposium, we set new goals for 2014-2018.

GOAL I: PROMOTION OF SOLIDARITY

We will be in solidarity with Benedictine *moniales* and *sorores* all over the world. In solidarity with weaker communities, we will promote mutual help through greater bonding, sharing of personnel, and spiritual and material support.

GOAL II: REVERENCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE AND CREATION

- A. We will recognize the sacredness and dignity of all peoples especially in war-torn countries where Benedictine communities are located, where moral crises are deeply felt, where migrants and refugees look for shelter, and where violence and all forms of abuse take place.
- B. We will promote reverence for God's creation in the world and encourage eco-friendly practices.
- C. We will commit ourselves to promote peace wherever we are.

At each of our meetings of the Conference and/or the Administrative Council, we process these goals using them as the focus for our activities.

The CIB Administrative Council and Conference have been developing plans for the 8th International Symposium for Benedictine Women. The Symposium will be held here at Sant'Anselmo, September 6-13, 2018. After collating suggestions from the participants of the 2014 Symposium and processing these with the CIB Conference, the CIB Administrative Council determined that the theme for 2018 would be to **LET ALL BE WELCOMED AS CHRIST...RB 53:1**. We will examine hospitality from the Scriptures and the Rule of St. Benedict in two keynote presentations. Both *moniales* and *sorores* will also reflect on hospitality not only to those outside the monastery but also to one another within the monastery. We have identified our presenters and the members of the Symposium Planning Team. We will be working on ways to process the presentations with the participants as well as developing the logistics of this event.

I am pleased to inform you that in a spirit of collaboration with you our brothers, we will be inviting an abbot from each of our regions to attend. The Abbots' President will be notified to encourage some of you to attend. Unfortunately, we can only accommodate 20 abbots. I know that many of you would be anxious to participate with us.

I wish to take the opportunity to thank Abbot Primate Notker Wolf for his collaboration with me throughout all these years. He has also been most supportive of the CIB – attending almost all of the meetings of the CIB Conference and the CIB Administrative Council. He has encouraged the Benedictine women to continue to deepen the networking with one another throughout the world. Abbot Notker, we deeply appreciate all you have done for us. Thank you. May God continue to bless you in many special ways as you begin a new chapter in your life's journey.

I would also like to extend a welcome to the new Abbot Primate, _____, and want to assure him of our willingness to do our part to collaborate with him. Abbot Primate _____, we assure you of our friendship, support and prayers.

In conclusion, I would like to say that over the nineteen years that I have been involved (15 years with the CIB), there has been an obvious development of solidarity and mutual support among the Benedictine women. Though there are differences among us, we have made great strides in appreciating the fact that we share a common charism. Our networking together around the world has been a profound occasion for us to join in the struggles within our diverse cultures. Together we keep before us our concerns about the present and our anxieties about the future of religious life, the Church, the world, and all of Creation. It has been a challenging and rewarding experience for me that I will never forget.

Thank you for your kind attention.