



**BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO**  
Curia dell'Abate Primate

June 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica,

Greetings of peace from Sant'Anselmo in Rome. These recent weeks have been filled with a variety of exciting and inspiring events here as we have commemorated the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Benedictine Confederation and the establishment of our Ateneo and Collegio at Sant'Anselmo. On Thursday, 19 April 2018, we had more than 200 participants for our audience with Pope Francis, bringing together a number of Benedictine organizations from around the world. It was beautiful to see and experience representatives of the whole Benedictine Order brought together and united: Abbots, Abbesses, members of the CIB, delegates from our Oblates, teachers and students from the ICBE, and residents and workers of Sant'Anselmo. The documents, photos, and publicity for this event can be found in full at [http://bit.ly/Jubilee\\_OSB\\_media](http://bit.ly/Jubilee_OSB_media). Pope Francis spoke with both warmth and gratitude for the ongoing witness of Benedictine life and the important part we play in the life of the Church, thanking us for our generous service. He greeted all the participants individually, assured us of his prayers, and asked a remembrance in our prayers. Then on Saturday, 21 April 2018, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Vatican, was principal celebrant and homilist for our commemorative Mass on the feast of Saint Anselm. Cardinal Parolin beautifully drew from the Scriptures a message of Benedictine spirituality, combining this with a genuine expression of gratitude for the long, faithful, and ever-growing witness of contemplative life joined to a sense of service to the Church. For this celebration, there were also ambassadors where our monks serve, superiors of religious communities who participate in the life of our schools, and friends of the Benedictine Confederation from near and far. The celebration of the liturgy, a festive *pranzo* (meal), and the opportunity to welcome our many guests were all elements that added to the great joy of this special jubilee for the Confederation and Sant'Anselmo.

During these days, our Board of Advisors for the Ateneo was also with us. We combined this special occasion also to give a focus to the spirit which distinguishes the manner of Benedictine education. On Friday, 20 April 2018, Abbot Jeremy Driscoll of Mount Angel Abbey and professor at Sant'Anselmo for 20 years, delivered a lecture on "Sapiential Learning in the Benedictine Tradition," followed by a lively discussion by our faculty and invited guests.

Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta, 5 | 00153 Roma (RM) | ITALIA  
Telefono : +39 06 57 91 267 | Fax : +39 06 57 91 374  
Email : [curiaosb@anselmianum.com](mailto:curiaosb@anselmianum.com)

Shortly after the celebration of the Confederation, the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy at Sant'Anselmo sponsored a Congress, entitled *Liturgy and Culture*. The opening address was given by His Eminence Gianfranco Cardinal Ravasi, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture and a well-known biblical scholar. With hardly a note before him, he spoke for an hour and mesmerized his audience with his grasp of Scripture, its images in relation to the liturgy, and its practical application to the celebration of the sacred mysteries today. This three-day Congress brought together both scholars and participants from around the globe. Father Jordi-Agusti Piqué i Collado, President of the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy and monk of Montserrat, planned and orchestrated this Congress with much success.

Picking up from the time of my last circular letter in Advent 2017, you will remember that we had a significant surprise one morning as we saw some of the marble slabs in the apse of the Church pulling away from the wall. Had one of those slabs fallen during the liturgy when someone was sitting in the apse, lives could have been lost. Fortunately, Father Mauritius, our Prior, together with Father Markus Muff, our Development Director and Director of Special Projects, worked together to bring a positive solution to that situation in time for the visit of Pope Francis to Sant'Anselmo for the penitential procession to Santa Sabina on Ash Wednesday. Accomplishing this in time, as Ash Wednesday came so early this year, showed the careful planning and hard work of a team of skilled craftsmen who worked on both restoring the marble slabs and also taking the opportunity to clean the mosaics in the apse, which now shine brightly. We lived with a makeshift sanctuary for the Christmas season, yet the sanctuary was set up in a dignified and fitting manner so that we could continue to celebrate the weddings and other events that had been planned.

The reading room of the library was completely renovated, following the effects of the earthquake experienced in October 2016. New lighting, updated work stations, and renewed floor mosaics all give a fresh and inviting look to our library. This project was organized and cared for by Father Markus Muff of Engelberg.

On the Saturday following Ash Wednesday, we have our regular meeting of the China Commission, which brings together Benedictines who have served in China, Abbots and religious superiors whose Congregations labor there, and those involved in a variety of social services quietly united to the efforts of the Church. Each year, we invite someone from the Vatican to be with us, as the officials there are most interested in the various happenings in China. This year, Father Roberto Lucchini, whose work rests primarily in relations with China, both spoke to us and also answered questions from members of the Commission. It was most interesting to hear about how diligently the Holy See is working to keep alive a *rapport* with China to end years of tension and establish a more friendly relationship between Church and State. Two young Chinese priests are studying this year at Sant'Anselmo through the generosity of Saint Vincent Archabbey in the United States. Each of these priests is working on graduate degrees respectively in liturgy at Sant'Anselmo

and in canon law at the Gregorian University. They were seminarians at Saint Vincent Seminary.

Following this meeting, I attended the annual meeting of BECOSA, the gathering of monastic communities of men and women of South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. In the context of this meeting, there were discussions on the various challenges and blessings which have come upon these monastic communities. While these communities of Benedictines have most of their roots in central and northern Europe, they are taking on a character that is specifically African, and are deeply proud of their heritage. During the first part of this meeting, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Peter Wells (originally of the Diocese of Tulsa in the United States) came to offer a word of encouragement and gratitude to the monastic orders who serve so well in their various apostolates, especially their prayerful spirit. Archbishop Wells talked of his monastic training both in Tulsa and at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, where he attended their seminary. Other than the meeting with superiors, there was the chance to visit three monastic communities. The monks of Inkamana, in the Saint Ottilien Congregation, have a school that was rated first of all secondary schools in South Africa, which is something of which they can be truly proud. Their superior, Father John Paul, was most gracious in welcoming me, inviting me to speak to their community, and then driving me to visit the two Benedictine communities of women at Tswana and Elukwatini. (It was personally interesting to visit this community as one of our retired superiors at Conception Abbey, Abbot Anselm Coppersmith, served this community for several years in establishing a formation program back in the 1980s.) At Tswana, not only were we treated to a delicious meal of African delights, but we were entertained by the young women who are candidates to their community with lovely singing and dancing. At Elukwatini, we had the opportunity to visit their home for the elderly, seeing what wonderful care the Sisters and their nurses provide for people who have no family to take care of them. All in all, it was an inspiring trip to South Africa.

I have been invited to celebrate and preach at the millennial celebration of the Abbey of San Miniato al Monte in Florence in October 2018. It is a very inspiring thought to reflect on the fact that for one thousand years, there has been a Benedictine monastic presence in this city of Florence where the Renaissance flourished, Church architecture established horizons, and some of the greatest artists of all time practiced their art. I made my annual retreat at San Miniato in the early days of March to get to know this young and growing community, so that I could come to their celebration with some knowledge of their past and present history. Abbot Bernardo Francesco Maria Gianni and the community were most warm and welcoming during some rather cold and wet days of Lent in Florence.

On 17 March, the entire community at Sant'Anselmo (Benedictine faculty, officials, students, and residents) participated in a Day of Formation with regard to the question of "Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults," presented by Father Hans Zollner, S.J. Father Zollner, a theologian and psychologist by profession, teaches at the Gregorian University. In addition to this work, he has been a member

of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors since 2014, and he heads the Center for Child Protection here in Rome. The title of his presentation was, "The Wounds Inflicted on the Body of Christ." Though his facts and information were sobering, his presentation was enlightening and informative for everyone, communicated with clarity and with examples that proved most helpful for appreciating the gravity of his topic. We are, at present, establishing a committee to prepare a document for "safeguarding" for Sant'Anselmo. We have already booked another presentation with Father Zollner for the next academic year.

I also was invited to preach at the abbatial blessing of the new archabbot of Pannonhalma, Cirill Hortobágyi. It was a most impressive ceremony as their former abbot, Auxiliary Bishop and Archabbot Asztrik Várszegi presided over the blessing of Archabbot Cirill. Archabbot Asztrik had served his community as its spiritual father for 27 years. The visit to Hungary also included a visit to three priories. The conventual priory of Győr offered a warm welcome both in the monastery and in their school. Both students and faculty carried with them both a warmth and joy that was inspiring and wonderful to behold; it was clear that the faculty worked well together, and the students were responsive and happy. Bakonybél, a dependent priory of Pannonhalma, is a monastic community of about seven monks who live a fraternal life in a rural setting, touching the life of the local people through a retreat program. They will be celebrating a thousand years of their founding, an occasion of great joy and hope for them, especially with their two fine young novices. The third priory of Tihany recently elected a young and vigorous prior to lead them forward in the living of the monastic life. All of these communities have fine young men entering their communities; it was a joy to meet and visit with these young men and to see their enthusiasm for the monastic life.

In the days following Easter, the German-speaking abbots of Austria, Germany and Switzerland gather for what has come to be known as the Salzburg Conference. This meeting moves among the three countries, this year being in Austria. Connected to this meeting is an outing to some place of interest. This year, we enjoyed the hospitality of the monks of the Abbey of Altenburg and the Abbey of Göttweig. Each of these monasteries has magnificent structures which are well preserved, demonstrating the hundreds of years since their foundation, and are located in settings that display the magnificence of God's creation. In line with Pope Francis' concern about the environment, we could see how well these monasteries preserve and care for the land and their buildings. While the Abbey of Altenburg provided a delicious snack of cakes, cookies and candy with delicious coffee in the afternoon with a tour of their beautiful Church and ancient foundations, the Abbey of Göttweig offered us a splendid celebration of Vespers, followed by a superb supper and wine-tasting, coupled with warm and fraternal hospitality, truly in the Benedictine spirit.

Following this meeting, a group of Oblates and benefactors of my home monastery of Conception Abbey came to Italy for a pilgrimage, "In the footsteps of Saint Benedict." This was a commitment made before being elected Abbot Primate, and it was a joy to welcome "friends from home" and especially to show my successor,

Abbot Benedict Neenan, the stirring and moving places in Italy associated with his heavenly patron. Our visits included Rome (San Benedetto in Piscinula and the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century fresco of Saint Benedict in the Basilica of San Crisogono), Assisi where the Benedictines gave Saint Francis his Church building, Montecassino, Subiaco, and Monte Oliveto Maggiore where we viewed the magnificent frescoes in the cloister, depicting the life story of Saint Benedict as given in *The Dialogues* of Saint Gregory the Great. Our pilgrimage concluded with Mass together at Sant'Anselmo.

The months of April and May are times when two of our foundations that serve Sant'Anselmo meet. (Our third foundation, Fondo Accademico, usually meets at the outset of the new academic year.) The Saint Benedict Education Foundation, centered at Saint Vincent Archabbey, raises funds for scholarships for Benedictine students who are studying at Sant'Anselmo. This year we met at the Savannah Priory in Georgia (USA). Again, it was inspiring to see the great support which this community has among its alumni; there was an occasion to celebrate Mass with them and speak to them about the work of the Benedictines at Sant'Anselmo. The monks of the Savannah Priory are greatly appreciated by their students, alumni, and the people of the area. Father Benoit Alloggia of Saint Vincent Archabbey serves as the director of the Saint Benedict Education Foundation. The Foundation Benedict in Switzerland met in Flüeli-Ranft, the hometown of Saint Nicolas de Flüe, a saint of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and patron saint of Switzerland, who lived an eremetical life yet served as a spiritual guide, healer, and peacemaker among the people of his life. We celebrated Mass in a chapel which honored the memory of Saint Nicolas and carried relics of this patronal saint of Switzerland; music was provided for this Mass by a wonderful group of Alpine singers, famous throughout Switzerland who have participated at the Mass for the swearing-in of the Swiss guards at the Vatican. Following our meetings, we enjoyed a thrilling cable car ride to the top of nearby Mount Pilatus, which provided a panoramic view of the Alps; it was breathtaking indeed. Father Markus Muff of Engelberg Abbey serves as the director of Foundation Benedict. With this visit to Switzerland, we also had the occasion to visit the Benedictine Sisters of Cham who have worked both in education and hospital ministry. Though a short visit, we enjoyed the opportunity for a question and discussion session with the community there, and as always, there was a warm and friendly welcome.

More recently, we received a request from Cardinal Koch of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to host a group of Russian Orthodox priests, accompanied by an archbishop of the Patriarchate of Moscow. They were among us to learn more about Saint Benedict and Benedictine life and spirituality. We had a full hour's session with them, and then they prayed Vespers with us, and enjoyed the evening meal (*cena*) with us in the monastic refectory.

As we send out this circular letter, we are finishing a successful and peaceful year in the Ateneo and Collegio at Sant'Anselmo. This year in the Collegio, we have been 85 residents of Benedictine students, faculty, and diocesan priests who are working on

graduate degrees. This number includes a few Orthodox ecumenical brethren who are pursuing studies here in Rome. We look forward to an increase in the number of residents for next year. With regard to personnel at Sant'Anselmo, we offer a word of thanks to Father Edward Linton of Saint Meinrad Archabbey who has been serving as guest master and director of special programs for the last three years; he will be moving to a new position at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. We look forward to welcoming Father Benoît Alloggia of Saint Vincent Archabbey who will come to work in the guest department and continue his work as director of the Saint Benedict Education Foundation. We also look forward to welcoming Abbot Emeritus Edmund Power of Douai Abbey who will become Director of Priestly Formation for the monks preparing for ordination in their theological studies at Sant'Anselmo. We want to express a word of thanks to Abbot Emeritus Pius Engelbert of Gerleve Abbey and former professor of Church History at Sant'Anselmo for offering time in our archives this past year; working with him was his confrere, Father Bartholomäus Denz. Many thanks to them for both their careful work and good advice in the care of our Confederation's archives. I again will make a plea for a monk to work full-time in IT Services. With the number of computers and the ways in which we have become so dependent upon technology, we could put a monk to good use for the well-being of the Confederation and Sant'Anselmo. If he does not speak Italian, we will send him to school to remedy that situation.

What does the summer hold for Sant'Anselmo? There are both programs of study and renovation projects before us.

1) The windows on the top floor, both in the rooms of faculty members and in the hallways, in Aula I and in the sacristy will be replaced this summer.

2) Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Father Louis Merton, OCSO, there will be a Thomas Merton Symposium at Sant'Anselmo, entitled "Thomas Merton: Prophecy and Renewal," hosted by the Monastic Institute on 12-15 June 2018. Keynote speakers will be Dr. Paul Pearson (Director and Archivist at the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky) and Father Michael Casey, OCSO (renowned monastic scholar, author, and conference director).

3) A course entitled "Holy Listening" will be taught by Father David Foster, OSB, monk of Downside Abbey and Professor at Sant'Anselmo, on 18-29 June 2018. This course gives an emphasis on Spiritual Accompaniment/Spiritual Direction as found in the Benedictine tradition with the search for God through the practice of *lectio divina*, and the traditions found in *The Rule of Saint Benedict* and the *Gospels*. This course is open to people of faith who desire to serve as spiritual guides to others. A full description of this course can be found by referring to the website for Sant'Anselmo under "Holy Listening."

4) The course "Cultural Dimensions of Christian Spirituality" will be taught from 2-13 July 2018. This successful program came into being in 2014 at Sant'Anselmo as a cooperation project with the Catholic Universities in Nijmegen (Netherlands) and Leuven (Belgium). It deals with a current topic – the interaction of (different) culture(s) and Christian spiritualities. This topic is approached from historical and anthropological viewpoints. The course is coordinated by our

resident Fr. Matthias Skeb, O.S.B. (monk of the Abbey of Königsmünster, Germany, and Professor of Patristic Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome) and Br. Thomas Quartier, O.S.B. (monk of the Abbey of Saint Willibrord and Professor for Liturgical and Monastic Studies at the Catholic Universities in Nijmegen and Leuven). Besides them, scholars and proven experts from Nijmegen, Tilburg, Vienna, Graz, and Rome are teaching in this course. Full information on the course can be found on the website of Sant'Anselmo under the title of the program.

Before closing and looking ahead, here is an important word about the *Monastic Formators Program for 2019*. This is a highly successful program which has been in existence since 2004, for monastic men and women who are looking to work in the areas of formation and education within their monastic communities or beyond. The program is taught in English and is open to monks, nuns and sisters who follow *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Thus far there have been over 360 participants, a number of whom have been chosen for positions of leadership in their communities. The program is scheduled to begin on 17 March and conclude on 14 June 2019. The directors of the program have worked to bring together some of the best educators in the monastic world to share their expertise with the participants. The directors of the program would like to have applications *completed by the end of September 2018*. Full information on the program can be found on the "home page" of the "Monastic Formators Program."

The summer of 2019 once again will begin the *Leadership according to the Rule of Saint Benedict* program. More details on this program will be forthcoming in the next circular letter.

There is always more to say and report, but for now, thank you for your interest in Sant'Anselmo and your prayerful remembrance of us and our endeavors. My prayers accompany all the monasteries of the Confederation each day, and all the monasteries of nuns and sisters, as well as our "best friends," our Oblates. Please remember me and all of us at Sant'Anselmo in yours.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbot Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.