



BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO
Curia dell'Abate Primate

30 June 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica,

It is once again time to update and inform the members of our Benedictine Order of the happenings of the last six months since last writing to you. Within the lives of monastic communities, there are always a variety of things happening, all of which bespeak change, conversion, transformation, and new life within the Benedictine Order. Some of these changes are challenging and others are great blessings. In the midst of all of this, God leads us forward, calling us to deeper faith, secure hope, and ever-generous love.

Last January began with a meeting of the executive committee of the women Benedictines (CIB) at the Abbey of Dinklage in northern Germany. It was a special joy to visit this community as one of my secretaries in the curia at Sant'Anselmo, Sister Anna Eichhorn, hails from this well-known community. It was a wonderful opportunity to have some time to visit with this community, aside from the meeting with the CIB members. There is always so much to learn about the foundation and development of our monastic communities. The visit to Dinklage was no exception. It was very inspiring to see how this contemplative community has a vigorous apostolic outreach on their own property with one house caring for the homeless and another house welcoming displaced immigrants. In both situations, these people are the recipients of great care, support, encouragement and love from the nuns of this community.

Sister Lynn McKenzie, Moderator of the CIB and a member of Sacred Heart monastery in Cullman, Alabama, led the days devoted to a variety of topics. Of considerable concern and discussion has been the document published by the Congregation for Consecrated Life, *Cor Orans*. This document has much to offer in organizing the contemplative nuns into congregations and federations. For example, the Superior of an autonomous monastery of nuns can grant one year of exclaustation (a faculty that the superior of an autonomous monastery of men does not have). This document has also offered some significant challenges. One of the challenges most discussed relates to the number of years now required for formation. The earlier documents called for three years of formation after temporary profession, or more, if needed; this new document calls for a total of 6 years of temporary formation. With aspirancy, postulancy and novitiate, this would be a total of 9 years. With the Benedictine emphasis on life-long formation, teaching by the abbot, abbess or prioress on a regular basis, and the daily practice of *lectio divina*, this seems like a very long time of engagement in formation. We have written to the Holy See with our concerns about this particular question for the monastic orders of Benedictines, Trappists and Cistercians of the Common Observance. We await a final word on this matter, and hope for a more realistic and open response in view of our monastic settings for the years of formation.

On Saturday, 19 January, we celebrated the blessing of the refurbished Aula XI on the bottom floor of Sant'Anselmo. This large classroom had a considerable amount of wasted space, and has now been made more user-friendly with new seating, up-to-date technology, and space to seat up to 80 students. Father Markus Muff oversaw this work and did a wonderful job of bringing this project to a successful and beautiful conclusion. We have now used this aula for a variety of different meetings and seminars, allowing us to use this handsomely renovated space to welcome groups from outside to participate in programs at Sant'Anselmo. Much of this work for the Ateneo was financed by the Foundation Benedict in Switzerland. Their assistance to Sant'Anselmo has been significant through the years, for which we are very grateful.

Because Pope Francis was to be in Panama for the close of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is regularly scheduled for the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, he presided at its opening on Friday, 18 January. Since the basilica is under the care of the Benedictine community there, it is always an occasion for many of us at Sant'Anselmo to be in the sanctuary for that special occasion. The Abbot Primate is always a member of the group who welcomes the Holy Father to this special evening of prayer. During that week, a delegation of Coptic Orthodox monks, priests, and bishops visited Sant'Anselmo for a presentation on Benedictine life, participation at the office of Vespers, and the evening meal with the monastic community. We are always pleased to be asked by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews to be part of their programs. The opportunity for exchange is always an enriching experience for all of us at Sant'Anselmo and also our visitors. Ecumenical exchanges with the Orthodox have also been a consistent feature of the recent visits of Pope Francis to a variety of countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Another aspect of dialogue has been with both Jews and Muslims. From 14-17 February, there was a group of Catholic and Jewish Pilgrims visiting both Rome and Jerusalem. This group was from Kansas City in the United States. They enjoyed Benedictine hospitality at both Saint Paul Outside the Walls and at Sant'Anselmo. As we all know, the first step in any kind of dialogue is developing a sense of friendship with those who share different beliefs from us. When both groups know that there is an openness to listen to one another, to learn from one another, and to respect one another, this leads to the possibility of dialogue on a deeper level of faith and beliefs. Father William Skudlarek of St. John's Abbey (Collegeville) remains the Executive Director of the Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue. In late March and early April, we had another meeting of the Monastic-Muslim Dialogue, this time at Ealing Abbey in London. The topic of "Conversion" stirred much good conversation with a variety of presentations. I spoke on conversion from biblical perspectives, and Dr. Mohammed Ali Shomali, of London's Institute of Islamic Studies, spoke on conversion as found in the Qur'an and Kalam. Sister Agnes Wilkins of Stanbrook Abbey, (England) presented a paper on two Muslims, one Turkish, the other Moroccan, who became Catholic priests in France in the early twentieth century and played an important role in promoting a positive view of Islam within the Catholic Church. Other reflections were made by Father Benoît Standaert of the Abbey of Saint Andrew's in Belgium, Sister Nasim Waliji of the Islamic Institute, Sheikh Maysam, and Sister Patricia Crowley of Saint Scholastica Monastery (Chicago). This encounter also included a visit to the Islamic Institute in London, joining them for both prayer and a social visit. Abbot-emeritus Timothy Wright, who had been a longtime member of DIM/MID and died in the course of this last year, was remembered with a visit to and prayer service at his grave at Ampleforth Abbey.

From 22-26 February, I joined the abbots, conventual priors and prioresses of North America for their joint meeting, which takes place once every four years. This year the joint meeting was held at St. Bernard Abbey and Sacred Heart Monastery, both in Cullman, Alabama. In both of these fine communities, the hospitality was first-rate. This year the theme was Hope. I gave two presentations on biblical perspectives of Hope, and Sister Susan Hutchens of St. Mary Monastery (Rock Island, Illinois) gave two excellent presentations on the spirituality of Hope in the present situation of our monastic life, the Church and our world. This meeting also afforded me the opportunity, while in the United States, to enjoy a visit to my home-community of Conception Abbey for a few days before the joint meeting.

Each Ash Wednesday, this year on 6 March, is marked by a visit of the Pope to Sant'Anselmo. We begin the opening prayers of the Lenten Season here, and then walk in procession to the Stational Church of Santa Sabina of the Dominicans. Pope Francis is always warm, gracious, kind, and ready to smile upon meeting anyone and everyone. Though you can see the strain of the walk from Sant'Anselmo to Santa Sabina in his breathing, he remains strong in spirit, vibrant in his preaching, and focused in his prayer. He always expresses to me his gratitude for the monastic witness of the Benedictines throughout the world.

The week of 10 March was a proud moment for Benedictines when the Abbot of San Miniato al Monte in Florence, Abbot Bernardo Maria Gianni, preached the retreat to the Pope and the members of different dicasteries. These monks of San Miniato also celebrated one thousand years of their church's existence in Florence with an entire year of events related to the rich history of culture in the city: art, music, spirituality, architecture, poetry, literature, and dance. Located just above the city, the monastery's calendar of various events drew large crowds of people, with invited guests from around the world. I was pleased to celebrate and preach for the feast of San Miniato and to be there for the closing of the Holy Doors at the end of the year's celebration.

On 16 March, the resident community at Sant'Anselmo participated in a Formation Day led by Father Hans Zollner, SJ of the Gregorian University and the Papal Commission on Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults. This is the second Day of Formation we have had with Father Zollner. A psychologist by profession, he has been involved in working on this problem for a number of years, and thus he brings both educational information and personal experience to his fine presentations. He is a great resource and fluent in several languages, so if your community is looking for some presentations on this significant topic, he is an excellent speaker. We will continue to avail ourselves of his expertise here at Sant'Anselmo.

This year Sant'Anselmo welcomed the 23 participants and their leaders, Father Brendan Thomas of Belmont Abbey (England) and Father Mark Butlin (Ampleforth, England) for the first half of the Monastic Formators' Program. They arrived on Sunday, 17 March from communities in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United States, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, China, the Philippines and Japan. This program brings together men and women from the three monastic Orders of Benedictines, Cistercians of the Common Observance, and Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists) for a period of about 3 months. The program is designed for those who are Formators or show promise to become Formation Directors and educators in their monastic communities. A variety of professors on monastic topics from all over the world are brought in to present classes in areas of monastic spirituality, Scripture, history, liturgy, and the ancient monastic Rules. Following 6 weeks in Rome, the next 7 weeks are spent in the tranquil environment of Assisi in Umbria. The program is scheduled now for every other year,

thus the next program will begin in the early spring of 2021, and is taught in English. This program has been very successful through a period of over two decades and intends to continue into the future. A word to superiors of monastic communities: Think of whom you might send to the next program in 2021. More information can be found on their website: www.monasticformators.org.

This year, for the solemnity of the *Transitus* of Saint Benedict, our principal celebrant and homilist at Sant'Anselmo was Cardinal Kurt Koch, from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (PCPCU). Cardinal Koch was Bishop of Basel in Switzerland before being asked by Pope Benedict XVI to come to Rome as head of this Pontifical Council. He has been a good friend of Sant'Anselmo through the years, involving the Benedictines in a variety of ecumenical endeavors, which we appreciate. In recent weeks, a Benedictine has been appointed as a theologian to the PCPCU, and is living with us here at Sant'Anselmo; his name is Father Augustinus Sander, a monk of Maria Laach. He has done extensive study on the writings and thought of Martin Luther; so he will be a good source for the Pontifical Council, and we are happy to have him here with us at Sant'Anselmo.

On the solemnity of the Annunciation, we celebrated the abbatial blessing of our Sant'Anselmo professor and Subprior, Abbot Oliver-Marie Sarr of Keur-Moussa, Senegal, West Africa. There was a wonderful representation of abbots present from throughout the Solesmes Congregation and representatives from other monasteries throughout Africa. There were approximately 2,000 people in attendance for the abbatial blessing, whose participation was so joyful and spirited. On the following day, all the monks and many guests participated in a Mass of Thanksgiving at the nearby Abbey of Benedictine nuns of Keur-Guilaye at which Abbot Olivier-Marie presided and I preached. Following the Mass of Thanksgiving, all the monks of Keur Moussa joined with the nuns and guests at a festive meal with much singing and dancing that took the better part of the day. While we will miss Abbot Olivier-Marie at Sant'Anselmo, he brings many gifts, talents, and great experience to his work as spiritual father of his monastic community in Keur- Moussa, Senegal.

Two days before Palm Sunday, the monks of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity in Cava de' Terreni celebrated their patronal feast of Saint Alferio. I was invited to preside and preach for the occasion. This abbey is located just outside Salerno and the Amalfi Coast, and is built into the side of a mountain. Their superior is Abbot Michele Petruzzelli, much beloved by his monks and all the people of the area. A walk through the town in the late afternoon had us mobbed by people that wanted to greet and visit with Abbot Michele. This monastery was founded in 1011 by a nobleman of Salerno who became a Cluniac monk, and has been inhabited by monks since that time; it is presently in the Subiaco-Cassinese Congregation. Their library is a national monument with documents dating back to the 8th century. Though it was a short visit because of Palm Sunday the following day, it was most memorable.

During Easter Week Father Prior Mauritius of Sant'Anselmo represented us at the annual meeting of the German-speaking abbots of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. This year the meeting was held at Nütschau Priory in Germany. The fifty or so abbots held a study day on religious language, looking for new ways to speak about the Faith. They heard the usual reports about various institutions of joint interest, especially Sant'Anselmo, the Salzburg study house, and the Salzburg Institute of Benedictine Studies. An outing was made to Lübeck, ancient city of the Hansa; it completed the program and familiarized the abbots with the Lübeck martyrs, three catholic and one protestant clergy who had been killed by the Nazis. During these same days, I

represented the Confederation at the closing of the millennial year at San Miniato al Monte in Florence, which was presided over by the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

On 29 April to 1 May, I attended the General Chapter of the Solesmes Congregation, held at the mother house of the Abbey of Saint-Pierre of Solesmes. Arriving the day before the Chapter, it was a wonderful occasion to meet and visit with the monastic community at Solesmes which continues its great tradition and happily receives new vocations. Abbot Philippe Dupont and his Council had decided to spend time during their General Chapter reflecting on the recent Synod on the Youth and its published documents. I was invited to give the opening talk, which led to a vigorous and interesting response among the abbots, lasting slightly over two hours. Abbot President Christopher Jamison of the English Benedictine Congregation, who was a participant at the Synod, was the other speaker for their General Chapter. Early spring in France was beautiful. Coupled with the warm and fraternal welcome from both the Solesmes community and the members of the General Chapter it made the visit a truly memorable occasion.

Our Board of Advisors for the Ateneo met on Thursday and Friday, 2-3 May with a good agenda to stimulate discussion and ideas for our university here in Rome. We were happy to welcome a female presence to the board in the person of Abbess Maria del Mar of Montserrat, Spain. One of the challenges we have yet to conquer is finding more space for Benedictine women who would like to study at Sant'Anselmo. It would be ideal for them to have their own house where they could form a community and have a rhythm of prayer together. This is a project that we still have before us. The Board of Advisors meets twice each year in October or November, and again in April-May, depending on schedules and availabilities of its members.

Beginning on 12 May, at the request of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Ateneo Sant'Anselmo began a three-month program for the implementation of the recent *moto proprio* of Pope Francis, *Magnum Principium*, giving greater authority to Episcopal Conferences for the translation of Latin texts for the liturgy. We have participants from Uganda, Pakistan, Guam, the Philippines, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Canada, Bangladesh, Holland, and Burkina Faso. These courses are taught by both professors of Sant'Anselmo and outside specialists. During a visit to the 14 priests in this program, Archbishop Roche encouraged the men taking this three-month intensive program to see how the liturgy continues to be a form of evangelization to all who participate in the liturgy. All the priests participating in the program come with at least an intermediate knowledge of Latin. It has been an intensive program, in class for about five hours each day with enough homework to keep them studying and working beyond their time in class. They have participated in the common and liturgical life of the community here at Sant'Anselmo, and commented on how much they enjoy that aspect of the program.

One of the responsibilities of the Abbot Primate is to serve as Procurator General for the Pontifical Greek College here in Rome. Last year we welcomed a new member to the staff, Father Thomas Bailey of Marmion Abbey in the United States. This coming year, the Spiritual Director, Father Michel van Parys of Chevtagne, is retiring after several years of service. Coming onto the staff in that role will be Father Gabriel-Florian Borzos of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. This college brings together seminarians from the various eastern rites who do their studies in Rome and have their liturgical, spiritual, and human formation at the Pontifical Greek College. This year the college numbered about 25 members.

At the end of May, I visited the monastery and preached the retreat for the monks of St. Peter's Abbey, located outside Saskatoon, Canada, in the town of Munster. They are a community that was founded by St. John's Abbey in 1892 as a territorial abbey in which the monks served the parishes in their particular area. They no longer hold this title, but their superior, Abbot Peter Novecosky, serves as secretary to the Episcopal Conference of Canada. In addition to the care of their extensive grounds, they run a college associated with the University of Saskatoon.

The Congregation of Olivetans is celebrating 700 years of its foundation under the spiritual guidance of Saint Bernardo Tolomei. Abbot Diego Rosa, President of the Congregation and Abbot of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, invited me to come for a special feast day during this jubilee year. I celebrated and preached for the solemnity of Pentecost with the community and their many Oblates and friends. The beauty of their monastery and location in the Tuscan hills is only second to their warm and gracious hospitality. They are a community with a lively faith, joyous spirit, and deep devotion to their liturgical life. May God's blessings continue to enrich their lives as they move forward into the next century of their love and service of Christ, His Church, the spirit of Saint Benedict, and the fervor of their founder, San Bernardo Tolomei.

The Permanent Council of the Synod of Presidents meets every two months. The members of that Council are Abbot-President Jeremias Schröder (St.Otillien Congregation, and Vicar of the Abbot Primate), Abbot-President Giuseppe Casetta (Vallombrosian Congregation), and Abbot-President Guillermo Arboleda Tamayo (Subiaco-Cassinense Congregation). We have spent a good bit of time planning for the Synod of Abbot Presidents which will take place this year 9-13 September in Mexico City, at the Abbey of Tepeyac. One of the days of our meetings will be spent with the executive committee of the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB)* in which we will discuss both the Synod on the Youth and matters relating to the various concerns of abuse in the Church, in monastic life, and in religious life. The members of the CIB will be meeting at the monastery of Benedictine women in Cuernavaca. One of the other major topics for the Permanent Council of the Synod of Abbot Presidents is the preparing for the Congress of Abbots in 2020; that work is well underway.

This has been a difficult year for Sant'Anselmo as we have lost one of our significant professors in liturgy and our Subprior, Father Olivier-Marie Sarr with his election as Abbot of the community of Keur-Moussa, mentioned earlier. His successor became Father Fernando Rivas (Lujan, Argentina). Then in May, the Rector of our university, Father Stefano Visitin was elected abbot of his community in Praglia, Italy. This comes after the election of Abbot Jeremy Driscoll to lead his community two years ago. For Sant'Anselmo, the departure of these people from our ateneo/university and from our community has been keenly felt. And yet, that is part of the life of Sant'Anselmo: the good men who come here as professors and administrators are then called home to serve as abbots or priors. For the life of Sant'Anselmo as the headquarters of our Order in Rome, we now need new Benedictines to take the place of these significant contributors to our community. In addition to that, we are still in need of someone to come to Sant'Anselmo to work in the area of computer science; please consider one of your younger monks who could come for four or five years – not a lifetime, just four or five years – to help us with this important work for the Ateneo, for the Badia, and for the Confederation.

The election of a new Rector for the Ateneo will take place at the beginning of the academic year. According to the Statutes of our Ateneo, the Vice-Rector, Father Philippe Nouzille, will serve as the Pro-Rector until the time of the election. We intend to engage the faculty in a

discussion of the qualities needed for the new Rector, and the tasks that lie ahead for him. Join us in praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this process of discernment and election.

After a year's break from the five years of the first cycle of the program, we will again have the *Leadership in the Rule of Saint Benedict* program this summer, 15-26 July 2019. It brings together professors from the School of Business at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland with monastic personnel and leaders in their monastic communities, reflecting and discussing how the *Rule of Saint Benedict* is applicable today for developing good leadership in our Benedictine communities. This time we are also welcoming as participants non-Benedictine religious, and lay men and women, who work within monastic communities in various positions of leadership (Business Offices, schools, retreat centers, and Development Offices). And once again, we are happy to welcome students for the academic program *Cultural Dimensions of Christian Spirituality* from 1-12 July 2019. This program runs each year and leads to a Master's degree. The leaders of this program are Father Matthias Skeb (Königsmünster Abbey, Meschede, Germany) and Brother Thomas Quartier (Saint Willibrord's Abbey in the Netherlands). For further information about both of these programs, please consult the website for the Ateneo Sant'Anselmo.

To conclude, our Benedictine motto of "peace" stands as a lighthouse amid the darkness in a world of obscurity and gloom. Christians driven from Iraq, immigrants separated from their families and homelands, civil wars within nations, varieties of uncovered abuse, threats of ecological doom, and so many more threatening situations bring us to our knees in prayer for those who suffer greatly. How important our witness of "peace" is wherever we find ourselves in community or in service of others. No one of us can turn our world's situation around, but God alone. Yet God invites us to be witnesses of the peace that can be lived in communities where deep listening, ready forgiveness, abundant compassion, generous hospitality, and willing obedience are found. Humble witness speaks loudly, more than we can imagine.

In the Benedictine Order, our Church, and our world, there are many things that discourage and weaken our hope as we look to the future. I can tell you from my perspective of visiting our monasteries and various involvements here in Rome, many good things are happening which show the power and strength of God's grace at work in our communities – and many of our communities are truly powerhouses of prayer and charity, centers of generous service and care for the poor and needy, and facilities that reach to the edges of society to do whatever is needed to make the Gospel and the Rule of Saint Benedict alive in our world today. Let us pray for one another; and let us also remember those communities in our Order that are struggling both interiorly and exteriorly. Let our solidarity in Christ, Saint Benedict, and Saint Scholastica strengthen us to be faithful witnesses of all that is true, good, and holy.

With prayer and hope in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbot Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Abbot Primate Gregory J. Polan, O.S.B.