



The Abbot President's Circular Letter

November 2019

Union of Superiors General: The 93rd General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General was held on November 27-29, 2019 at Centro Pellegrini Santa Teresa Couderc in Rome. Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B. and Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B., were among the 300 superiors general present. The theme of the assembly was "Religious Life in the 21st Century." Among the presenters were Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J. with updates from the Amazon Synod, Sr. Sheila Kinsey, F.C.J.M. on practical applications of *Laudato si*, Mons. Matteo Visioli from the C.D.F. on *Vos estis lux mundi* and Fr. Michael O'Murchu, M.S.C. on discernment of prophetic witness. A panel of four young religious also addressed the assembly on their discernment to the consecrated life. Finally, the assembly ended with a plenary session with Pope Francis in the synod hall on various current issues.

Richmond Update: Following the canonical visitation last fall, the monastic community at Mary Mother of the Church Abbey in Richmond, VA have been working on new governance structures for both the school and the monastery. Father Daniel Ward, O.S.B. (Collegetown) and Father John Fortin, O.S.B. (Manchester) are working as consultants on these new structures. To assist in their implementation, Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B., after hearing his council, has appointed Father Jonathan Licari, O.S.B. (Collegetown) as residential canonical administrator of the monastery, effective December 30, 2019. Father Jonathan has served as prior of his monastery and as headmaster of St. John's Prep. He is a distinguished canonist and member of the Congregation's canonical affairs commission. Thank you to Father Jonathan and to Abbot John Klassen and community in Collegetown for this generous response to our monks in Richmond!

President's Council: The Abbot President's council met together with our financial advisers at St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, PA on November 6-9, 2019. The purpose of this meeting was to review and discuss the annual certified audits of the houses and schools of our Congregation as required by our proper law. Father Isaiah Frederick, O.S.B. (Collegetown) coordinated the meeting, working together with the other financial advisers, which include Abbot Mark Cooper, O.S.B. (Manchester), Father Martin Bartel, O.S.B. (Latrobe), Father Luke Turner, O.S.B. (Atchison), Mr. Harry Haslam, CPA (Savannah) and Mr. Daniel Meehan, CPA (Morristown). This was also the first meeting of the newly elected councilors to the Abbot President: *1st councilor* Abbot John Klassen, O.S.B. (Collegetown), *2nd councilor* Abbot Mark Cooper, O.S.B. (Manchester), *3rd councilor* Father Edward Mazich, O.S.B. (Latrobe), *4th councilor* Father Elias Correa-Torres, O.S.B. (Belmont) and Father Bede Kotlinksi, O.S.B. (Cleveland) who serves as executive secretary.

Canonical Visitations: Abbot Isaac Camacho, O.S.B. (St. Leo) and Father Richard Ulman, O.S.B. (Latrobe) conducted the quinquennial canonical visitation at Abadia del Tepeyac, Izcalli, Mexico on October 21-29, 2019. The Abbot President was also present. Abbot Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. also conducted a special visitation at St. Benedict Monastery, Polokwane, South Africa on August 15-26, 2019.

Pastoral Visits: The Abbot President made the following pastoral visits: Collegio Sant'Anselmo, Rome on November 29-December 2, 2019; Mary Help of Christians Abbey, Belmont, NC on October 27-November 2, 2019; Mary Mother of the Church Abbey, Richmond, VA on September 19-26, 2019 and August 28-September 2, 2019; St. Bernard Abbey, Cullman, AL on July 21-27, 2019; Mosteiro São Bento, Vinhedo, Brazil on July 13-20, 2019; St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe PA on July 9-12, 2019.

Abbatial Election: The monks of St. Bernard Abbey, Cullman, AL elected Father Marcus Voss, O.S.B. as their tenth abbot on July 24, 2019. Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. presided at and confirmed the election. The Most Rev. Robert J. Baker, D.D., Bishop of Birmingham, conferred the abbatial blessing on

October 14, 2019 in St. Bernard Abbey Church. Also present were Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B., Archabbot Douglas Nowicki, O.S.B. (Latrobe) who preached the homily, Abbot James Albers, O.S.B. (Atchison), Abbot Austin Murphy, O.S.B. (Lisle), Abbot Placid Solari, O.S.B. (Belmont). Cullman's two retired prelates, Abbot Cletus Meagher, O.S.B. and Abbot Victor Clark, O.S.B. were also in attendance as was Prioress Tonette Sperando, O.S.B. and the Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery. *Ad multos annos!*

ICBE Sydney: The International Commission on Benedictine Education together with Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B. and 200 monastic and lay educators from Benedictine secondary schools in 17 different countries gathered at St. Scholastica's College in Glebe Point, Sydney, Australia on September 30-October 4, 2019 for the triennial symposium of the Benedictine Educators' Network (BENet). Keynote speakers included Terry Creagh on "The Australian Culture;" Abbot Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. on "Renewing the Vision of Benedictine Education;" Father Michael Casey, O.C.S.O. on "Benedictine Education in Two Words;" Dr. Kathy Cox on "Collaborativity in Benedictine Practice and Wisdom." In addition, there was a four-person panel discussion on "The Future of Benedictine Education," plus numerous workshops on various educational, pedagogical and catechetical topics for our network of 180 Benedictine secondary schools. The symposium concluded with the announcement that the next international conference will take place at Colegio de São Bento in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on October 10-15, 2022.

Annual Synod of Presidents: Each year, the nineteen Abbots President of the Benedictine Confederation meet in synod with the Abbot Primate. This year, our Congregation hosted this synod at Abadia del Tepeyac in Izcalli, Mexico from September 9-14, 2019. The Synod members received reports from the Rector, Prior and Treasurer of Sant'Anselmo. In accordance with the *Lex Propria*, they also approved the Subsidium and Solidarity funds to Sant'Anselmo for FY19-20. Representatives of *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* (C.I.B.), which is the international association of Benedictine women, joined the Synod on September 11, 2019 for a plenary session and discussion. This was the first such joint meeting of the Synod and C.I.B. In addition, each of the nineteen monastic Congregations of the Benedictine Confederation made brief reports on their respective annual activities. In addition, Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. made a presentation on the new *motu proprio, Vos estis lux mundi*. The Abbot Primate and Abbots President also celebrated Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City on September 12, 2019 together with Benedictine monks and nuns of the area, with a festive supper together at Colegio de Guadalupe. The Synod concluded with a cultural visit to the Pyramids of Teotihuacan on September 13, 2019. Sincere gratitude to Abad Ricardo Tintos Delgado and the monastic community of Tepeyac for the gracious and generous hospitality!

CMSM San Antonio: The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) met for their annual assembly from August 5-8, 2019 at the Omni Hotel on Colonnade Blvd. in San Antonio, Texas. This national association of superiors of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life in the United States held an extraordinary convocation to discern and discuss the collective witness of religious priests and brothers at this time in the life of the Church. A panel of six major superiors and young religious from the Jesuit, Marist and Legionary traditions discussed the core of religious witness and ministry today. Among the keynote presentations were Bro. Larry Schatz, F.S.C. and Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. who spoke about religious life today and into the future. The assembly celebrated Mass at the historical Mission San José, presided by Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Silva, M.Sp.S. The assembly concluded with the election of new members of the board: Very Rev. Adam Gregory Gonzalez, O.C.D. was elected President; Very Rev. Bro. Patrick McNamara, F.M.S. was elected Vice-President; Very Rev. Eric Andrews, C.S.P. and Very Rev. Jeffrey Kirch, C.PP.S. were elected members-at-large.

Praesidium: Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. and Father Roman Paur, O.S.B. (Collegeville) attended the biannual meeting of the Praesidium board on July 1-2, 2019 at their national offices in Arlington, TX. In accordance with the proper law of the Congregation, all the houses are to have a policy on child protection in accordance with the norms of the Church. The Conference of Major Superiors of Men has engaged Praesidium in the development of these policies.

Benedictine Leadership Institute: Thirty-three lay administrators and teachers from Benedictine secondary schools met at St. John's Abbey and Prep School in Collegeville, MN for this annual one-week institute on June 24-28, 2019. The opening keynote on RB 72, "Good Zeal in Benedictine Schools," was given by Abbot President Elias Lorenzo, O.S.B. Abbot John Klassen, O.S.B. gave another keynote on the Elements of Benedictine Formation and Father Lew Grobe, O.S.B. gave another on the Value on Manual Labor in the Monastic Tradition. Brother David Paul Lange, O.S.B. and Father Timothy Backous, O.S.B. led a discussion on Benedictine Happiness. A keynote on the Vocation to Benedictine Education by given by Dr. Mary Hinton and Dr. Rodger Narloch. In addition, various experiences on *lectio divina* were led by Brother Paul Vincent Niebauer, O.S.B., Mr. Paul Diethlem and Betsy Johnson-Miller. Participants joined the monks for daily prayers and Mass and were also welcomed by the Benedictine Sisters for prayer and a meal together at St. Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN.

General Chapter Update: Forty abbots and delegates met at St. Anselm Abbey, Manchester, New Hampshire on June 16-23, 2-19 for the 53rd General Chapter of the Congregation. Also invited to participate were the priors of dependent houses. After hearing from Dr. Elizabeth Drescher of Santa Clara University and Mr. Curtis Martin, founder of FOCUS, the abbots and delegates developed and approved "A Benedictine Response" to the apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit*, on youth, faith and vocational discernment. The abbots and delegates also approved three proposals from the canonical affairs commission on 1) the possibility of non-ordained abbots; 2) sabbaticals for abbots; 3) abbots in special circumstances. The proposal for the possibility of non-ordained abbots requires further approval from the Holy See. The Abbot President has forwarded that proposal to the Abbot Primate to present to Pope Francis. The abbots and delegates elected a new council to the Abbot President as noted above, each serving for a three-year term. Finally, the abbots and delegates approved the proposal that the 54th General Chapter be held at St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, KS on June 19-24, 2022.

Upcoming Events: Mark Your Calendars!

- **February 14-18, 2020 Annual Abbots' Workshop** at Prince of Peace Abbey, Oceanside, CA. For more information, email abbeyretreat@aol.com
- **June 16-19, 2020 Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities** at St. Martin's Abbey & University, Lacey, MA (www.abcu.info)
- **June 13-23, 2020 Juniorate Formation Program** at Mary Help of Christians Abbey, Belmont, NC For more information, contact Fr. Elias Correa-Torres, O.S.B. (eliasosb@bac.edu)
- **June 21-26, 2020 Benedictine Leadership Institute** for lay administrators and educators in secondary schools at St. Anselm Abbey & College, Manchester, NH (www.benetna.org)
- **June 28-July 3, 2020 Benedictine Vocation Directors' Convocation** at St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, KS. For more information contact Brother Leven Harton, O.S.B. (levenharton@gmail.com)