



BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO
Curia dell'Abate Primate

Advent-Christmas 2019
O Wisdom from on High

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica,

Greetings of Advent peace from Sant'Anselmo in Rome. As we draw close to the celebration of the Lord's Birth, it is a good moment to wish each of our monastic communities all the joys of these Advent and Christmas seasons. As we observe these blessed seasons, there are also many things in our world, our Church, and our monastic communities which feel the tensions of these times. For that reason, the Advent season of "waiting in joyful hope" for the coming of the Lord carries a special significance this year. We wait for God's peace to envelope our communities, our Church, and our world. Thus, "to wait in joyful hope" stands as a sacred posture for people of faith. God always works in the midst of our challenges and struggles, and calls us to trust that the work of divine grace is touching our lives in often quiet, humble, and unobtrusive ways. Our task is to keep an open ear to listen to what the divine voice speaks to us in these moments, and to move forward in faith and trust. As I have visited numerous communities in these last months, in each of them, there has been a witness of profound faith and genuine hope which enables us to move forward into the future, knowing that our monastic witness stands as a potent symbol to the world that surrounds us.

Though the academic year concludes at the end of June, July is a busy month of studies of a different and varied nature. This last summer, at the request of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, we had a three-month course training priests to translate Latin texts for the liturgy into their native languages. The program began after Easter and finished in July. This program was in accord with 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 had participants from Uganda, Pakistan, Guam, the Philippines, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Canada, Bangladesh, Holland, and Burkina Faso. The program finished so well that the participants asked for another similar program, taking them a step further into the challenging work of translating Latin texts for the liturgy. Living with us at Sant'Anselmo, they greatly appreciated the Benedictine hospitality. We hope to continue this program, employing faculty of both Sant'Anselmo and other universities.

There was also a two-week course in July, "Cultural Dimensions of Christian Spirituality," coordinated by our resident Father Matthias Skeb, O.S.B., of the Abbey of Königsmünster, Germany, and Professor of Patristic Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and Brother Thomas Quartier, O.S.B., monk of the Abbey of Slangenburg and Professor for Liturgical and Monastic Studies at the Catholic Universities in Nijmegen and Leuven. This program has continued for several years and continues to draw new students; it awards a "specialist certificate" at the fulfillment of all the requirements. The next unit will take place from 6 to 17 July

2020. These classes are attended by both Benedictines and lay students; we are especially pleased to welcome Benedictine monks, nuns and sisters to Sant'Anselmo for these and other courses.

Because of the great demand, Sant'Anselmo has again offered a program focused on leadership for monastic communities. This last summer the program ran from 14 – 26 July 2019. The two academic directors of the program were Prof. Dr. Günter Müller-Stewens and Father Mauritius Wilde, Prior of Sant'Anselmo. The managing director is Sister Ulrike Soegtrop of Dinklage, Germany, the Abbey of Saint Scholastica. The two-week-course is intended not only for Abbots, Priors, Abbesses, Prioresses, but also for treasurers, business managers, headmasters of schools, as well as for lay people who work in a context of a monastic community. The course, again co-directed by professors of the renowned School of Business at the University of St. Gall, Switzerland, with successful monastic leaders drawn from Benedictine communities, is very practical, but at the same time teaches both the scientific and the spiritual background. Topics are discussed from both a spiritual dimension and a business model, giving a fully integrated approach to learning. I encourage monastic superiors to consider sending two members of your community at the same time to this course, so that implementation of its teaching will be easier to put into practice within the context of your community's endeavors. The dates for next year's program will be 19-31 July 2020. Applications will soon be made available.

Before the Synod of Presidents began, there was the opportunity to visit the Priory of Our Lady of the Angels in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where Father Konrad Schaefer serves as the spiritual father of this growing community. They are a foundation of Mount Angel Abbey, and their foundation continues to develop and develop with talented and gracious monks. Following this visit, Fr. Konrad, who served as secretary of the Synod, and I went to Tepeyac where the monks were waiting for us. The Synod of Abbot Presidents took place this year in Mexico City at the Abbey of Tepeyac. The monks truly went out of their way to make us feel welcome whether in the monastery itself, the abbey church, or with our travels; the warm and fraternal hospitality was felt by all of us. A word of gratitude also goes to Abbot Elias Lorenzo, President of the American-Cassinese Congregation who first suggested this site for the Synod, for all the care he put into helping make the Synod a success and enjoyable meeting. For the meeting of the Synod itself, there were several items of business which arose and will come next September to the Congress of Abbots for discussion and a vote. One of the items discussed and decided upon by the members of the Synod was the *subsidiary* and solidarity paid by each of the monasteries of the Confederation. There was a unanimous consent on the study of the new *subsidiary* and solidarity, prepared by the Commission on this project under the leadership of Abbot Giuseppe Casetta of Vallombrosa. The changes to the present structure are intended to provide a fair taxing of the monastic communities throughout the world. The system will be further explained and discussed at the Congress.

There was also a discussion of the modification of the Statutes of the Ateneo for the selection of its Rector; this decision had already been approved by the Holy See and implemented this Fall 2019. For the *collegio*, Father Mauritius, Prior at Sant'Anselmo, presented the changes to the *Regolamento*, the rules and guidelines which govern life at Sant'Anselmo. These guidelines relate to our policy for the protection of minors and the promotion of a culture of safety for those who would live and come to visit at Sant'Anselmo. A presentation was given by Abbot Elias Lorenzo on the Holy Father's most recent document on safeguarding in the life of the Church: *Vox estis Lux mundi*. His presentation concluded, after discussion and questions, with the following recommendation: That each monastery have a policy on sexual "in accordance with the norms of the Church," a policy that is mandated, and that each policy be a matter of review in the canonical

visitation of the monastery. This recommendation was unanimously approved. In working on this project both at my home monastery at Conception Abbey and here at Sant'Anselmo, I strongly encourage every monastery to follow up with a safeguarding plan and attention to the Holy Father's most recent document, noted above.

In addition to these topics of presentation and discussion, there were the usual reports from the various Benedictine Congregations, giving an update on the significant happenings within the monasteries of the Confederation. The annual reports on the Ateneo and the financial reports on the Confederation, the *Collegio*, and the *Atento* were all made, assuring the members of the Synod that we remain financially solvent and explaining some of the challenges we have experienced this past year, especially regarding the renting of some of our properties. However, keeping a close eye on these matters, we again have finished the fiscal year in the black, which testifies to the good stewardship among our business office personnel.

One of the distinctive parts of the Synod this year was that the members of the CIB joined the Synod of Abbot Presidents for a half-day of presentations and group discussions; this was the first time the two groups met together in plenary sessions. The CIB was meeting in Cuernavaca at the Benedictine Sisters, Misonera Guadulapanas de Cristo Rey, and traveled to Mexico City for a joint meeting with the Synod of Abbot Presidents where we had presentations and conversations about the Vatican Synod on Youth and also about the sexual abuse crisis in the church and its impact in our monasteries. This was an excellent opportunity for communion among Benedictine leaders of women and men. While in Mexico City, all the Benedictine men and women made an inspiring pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In addition to this pilgrimage, the members of the CIB met together with the Benedictine sisters at the monastery of Misoneras Guadalupe in Mexico City. This was a time of warm sharing and enlivening presence together.

In their meetings at Cuernavaca, the presentations made to the CIB members included talks and discussions with the Abbot Primate about happenings in the Benedictine world; Abbot President Jeremias Schroder of the St. Ottilian Congregation told of a situation of Tanzanian Sisters with an abusive Bishop; Sister Esther Fangmann, Prioress of Mount Saint Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas (USA), a professional psychologist, talked about the impact of sexual abuse on members of a monastic community; Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes, Mexican Benedictine prioress of Torreon, Coahuila and theologian, gave a report on the Latin American monastic experience among Benedictine women; and Sister Susana Hernandez, a Mexican sister of the Catequistas de María Santísima community of Benedictines, reported on the Vatican Synod on Youth. The CIB members commented of the joy of having so many Benedictines from around the world with them, yet sadly noted that it was not possible for all to receive visas to participate in this meeting. Many of these same CIB members will be observers at the Abbots' Congress in 2020. It would be incomplete to speak about the Synod and the meeting of the CIB Conference without mentioning the warm, inspiring and joyful experience of a true Mexican fiesta celebrated the evening that we were all together at Tepeyac. Many tables of food, early native Mexican dancing, and a variety of local custom and costumes made it a night for all to happily remember.

On 18 September 2019, Father Maximilian Kolbe Musindai, who is superior of the new monastery and House of Studies in Cairo known as St. Benedict of the Copts, successfully defended his doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies here in Rome. This Institute was founded in 1926 by the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (formerly known as the "White Fathers") for the purpose of study, research, and scientific activities for a more informed theological dialogue with Muslims. This program of study is very demanding

because of the knowledge of Semitic languages, and also highly regarded because of the present desire of Pope Francis for healthy dialogue with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Hearty congratulations to Father Maximilian, as he prepares his dissertation for publication.

From 24 September until 3 October, I was in Australia to participate in the BENet meetings and to visit the Benedictine communities there. BENet is the regular gathering of the International Commission on Benedictine Education (ICBE), whose president is Abbot-President Elias Lorenzo of the American-Cassinese Congregation. This year the program is hosted by the Benedictine Sisters of the Good Samaritan and Good Samaritan Education. The opening ceremonies included native Aboriginal rituals and dances, enlightening all the participants of the rich cultural heritage found in Australia. This year's topic for presentations and discussions focused on the governance in education, with its diverse expressions of Benedictine spirituality. Participants in the program included representatives from every continent. I was pleased to offer the opening Welcome and to preside and preach at the opening Mass. The enthusiasm of all the participants was strong and offered a rich intermingling of the Benedictine spirit in a variety of inspiring expressions.

While in Australia, there was the opportunity to visit the Nuns at Jamberoo, coming from England and founded in 1849, with strong and happy connections to Stanbrook Abbey (England). Over the years I had the opportunity to meet several of the Nuns who participated in the Monastic Formators Program; so it was a special joy to meet them again in the community about which they had spoken so warmly, and also to meet their newly elected superior, Mother Hilda Scott. Their monastery is designed on one basic level with easy access to all its rooms. The Nuns are involved in a variety of cottage industries with range from soap making to candle creations for paschal candles and other occasions – all beautifully and professionally done by the Nuns. With the whole community, we enjoyed a warm and friendly discussion on monastic values, spirituality, and a variety of questions about the larger Benedictine world.

From there, I had a fraternal visit to the monks of New Norcia who live in the area of Perth, on the western end of Australia. It was surprising for me to find that a flight from Sydney to Perth is close to five hours in length; my sense of the geographical space in Australia has certainly been corrected by experience. Since the 1840s, these monks of the Subicao-Cassinese Congregation have been involved in a variety of apostolic endeavors from education to pastoral administration to retreat work. Abbot John Herbert gave me a tour of the various schools and a most impressive museum which shows the history and culture of this area in a truly professional manner. From Perth back to Sydney, we had a visit to the community at Arcadia in the Sylvestrian Congregation. Abbot David Orr has been very happy to welcome back among his fold recently Abbot-President-emeritus Michael Kelly, who has served his congregation for the past 12 years at their headquarters of *San Stefano Protomartire* here in Rome; Abbot Michael was chosen my first Vicar after my election as Abbot Primate – a wise and pastorally sensitive choice, someone with whom I shared a happy friendship with regular Sunday afternoon walks to the variety of churches and museums here in Rome. This community engages in a variety of different apostolic endeavors from retreat ministry to programs in liturgy and biblical studies. Finally, I finished my stay in Australia with the community that graciously hosted me, the Benedictine Sisters of the Good Samaritan. This community has had such a significant part to play in the education of children and adults at all levels, working in five dioceses throughout Australia. Their community is about 235 members working throughout Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and Kiribati. In all these monasteries and communities, the hospitality was most gracious, genuinely warm, and so very welcoming – in the best Benedictine spirit.

On 4 October, the faculty met to elect a new rector for our Ateneo. With a change in the Statutes according to the guidelines of the Pontifical Universities, *Veritatis Gaudium*, the procedure was to choose three names which would serve as a *terna* for the Chancellor, in our case, who is the Abbot Primate. He would choose from among these three names, and submit it to the Congregation for Catholic Education. Both my choice and the vote of the faculty was for Father Bernhard Eckerstorfer, a monk of Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria, to serve as Rector of our Ateneo Sant'Anselmo. The confirmation of the Holy See of his appointment, following the usual protocol of verifying his credentials and his publications, recently arrived. He comes to us with experience in teaching both at the University of Salzburg and the University of Linz in Austria. While doing his doctoral studies at the University of Salzburg, he did research and study in the United States at both Duke University and Yale University. Quickly he became known in the States, and was the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. He spent two years studying at Sant'Anselmo in the Monastic Institute after he has completed his doctorate. He has most recently been serving as Novice Master in his community. We welcome him here with joyful anticipation of his leadership and enthusiastic monastic spirit.

In the week in which the faculty prepared for the election of the new Rector, the new students had their orientation week. Taking a week to get to know Sant'Anselmo and our style of living here is a good preparation for life in the *Collegio* when the older students arrive and the academic year begins. Living together in an international community widens our horizon by getting to know some aspects of other cultures. A special occasion for that are the evening masses about once a month, which are prepared by language groups. In this academic year we have already had a German mass and a mass in the rite of the Syro-Malabar Church, and we are looking forward to more of these events in 2020. Each of these masses is followed by the evening meal, which is enriched by some typical food chosen (and sometimes prepared) by the members of the language group.

Each new academic year brings a variety of changes in personnel and residents, both for the *collegio* and the Ateneo. Joining our faculty this year for the first semester is Father Laurentius Eschlböck of the Abbey of Schottenstift in Vienna. He is teaching Canon Law in the Theology Department. In the *Collegio* this year we have 103 residents. Of these, there are 74 Benedictine monks from 57 different monasteries. They come from 36 different countries throughout the world. In addition to this we have 14 diocesan clergy in various levels of study. There are many Bishops throughout the world who appreciate our willingness to accept some of their candidates as residents among us, grateful for the rhythm of life and the spirit of this combined monastery and House of Studies. To keep a healthy and appropriate climate in both the *Collegio* and the Ateneo, we have worked on policies for safeguarding our university and our residence.

From 16-22 October, there was the opportunity to visit the Benedictine monasteries in Poland. The first visit was to the Abbey of Tyniec who, this year, was celebrating 80 years of having been restored following the earlier Austrian suppression. As with many monasteries in Europe, with the change of governments, borders, and rulers, this community experienced a time of abundant flourishing and also a time of suppression. It was a great honor to preside and preach in this abbey church which dates its origins back to the 11th century. This beautiful monastery is located just above the Vistula River, and is a center of Catholic life, located only about 10 miles from the center of Krakow.

From there we visited a series of communities of Benedictine women in Poland. I was guided to all of these communities by the fraternal kindness of Abbot Szymon Hizycki. In Staniatki

we have the longest surviving community of Benedictine Nuns, who have been living their charism without interruption in Poland from 1218. Then we had the opportunity to see the splendid Baroque architecture of the Benedictine Nuns in Krzeszow, which is also a place of inspiring pilgrimages. Our next trip was to the Benedictine Nuns of Perpetual Adoration in Wroclaw (Breslau) and in Warsaw. In the Warsaw community, we visited with Mother Blandina who serves as the President of the Federation and a delegate to the CIB. The community of Benedictine Nuns of Wolow is a small but very welcoming community. The Camaldolese Benedictines of Zloczew are a vibrant and joyful community that continues to receive good vocations. The next set of visits were to Benedictine Sisters involved in different apostolic endeavors. The Sisters of Warszawa-Rembertow run an impressive publishing company of spiritual books, liturgical pamphlets, and one Catholic newspaper. The Benedictine Sisters of Samaria in Niegów hold a special ministry of charity by caring for mentally handicapped men and women; their system of “family living” for their residents is both touching and inspiring. Finally the Missionary Sisters of Saint Benedict in Otwock are a community that I first came to know in the United States. Their ministry is to care for young children in nurseries. Everywhere I went, I felt so warmly received. Being of Czech origin myself, I felt like I was in the home of my cousins!

On 24-25 October, the Board of Advisors on our Ateneo met at Sant’Anselmo. You will remember that this is a board established just three years ago of outside consultants from various backgrounds in education, finance, and marketing to serve the Ateneo with ideas in a consultative manner. This time, each of the Deans had the opportunity to speak to the members of the Board, and a good discussion followed giving both suggestions and reactions to various elements of our structure and program of study. An atmosphere of open and constructive dialogue made for a productive meeting.

The week of 3-8 November was a busy time as the organizational team for the next Congress of Oblates in 2021 worked together to plan the basic structure of the meeting. The International Congress of Oblates takes place every four years and draws Oblates from across the globe who represent their respective monasteries. The next Congress is planned for 6-12 November 2021 at the *Fraterna Domus* convention center outside of Rome. Its theme is “Moving forward: Living the Wisdom of the Rule.” The keynote speakers include Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, Mother Marie Madeleine Caseau, noted author on The Rule of St. Benedict and president of the Congregation of Sainte Bathilde in Vanves, France, and Archabbot Donato Ogliari of Monte Cassino in Italy. The planning team for the 2021 Congress includes more than 25 Oblates representing more than a dozen countries across five continents. After their recent meeting in Rome at Sant’Anselmo, they plan to meet again in 2020 at *Fraterna Domus* in Roma. Father Benoît Allogia, a French-born monk of St. Vincent Archabbey in the USA, who is now one of the guest masters at Sant’Anselmo, is in charge of the overall planning of the Congress.

From 16-21 November, there were several commitments that brought me to visit two Benedictine communities, and many monastic men and women in France. From 16-18 November, there was a conference for new members to Benedictine communities throughout France, bringing together about 25 postulants, novices and simply professed of men’s and women’s communities to the Abbey of Tournay, near the Pyrenees in southern France. Under the direction of Abbot Joël Chauvelot and his community, we enjoyed gracious hospitality, prayerful liturgies, and warm welcome. I had the opportunity to speak to the new members of the French communities about the Psalms, the silence between Psalms for short-private prayer, and also thoughts about the violent and angry language in the Psalter. There was a particularly good discussion on these topics, with insightful reflections among the participants. The following day

included an outing to Lourdes; despite the grey skies, the group enjoyed both an inspiring and a friendly day together. Only toward the end of the day did the rain come as we returned to Tournay for Vespers and supper with the monastic community.

The next part of our visit to France was for a wonderful jubilee celebration for the Abbey of Saint Guénolé at Landévennec. This monastic community of the Subiaco-Cassinense Congregation was celebrating 1,200 years in which the Rule of Saint Benedict was established in this community. With a decree of King Louis, son of Charlemagne, in 818, the Rule of Saint Benedict was decreed the monastic rule to be observed in this country – a country which has a very long, inspiring, creative, and productive monastic spirit. I was honored to preside and preach at the closing Mass of the Year of Jubilee at Landévennec. Abbot Jean-Michel Grimaud and his community provided a wonderful spirit in which about 40 abbots and friends of the monastery participated. Together we prayed the office of None in the ruins of the first monastery, facing the broad and rich blue sea before us. And despite the strong winds, in that celebration, we erected a cross in the ruins to commemorate these 1,200 years in which Saint Benedict's Rule was faithfully lived, despite periods of exile, deportation, and renovation of the community. Following this ceremony, I was asked to give the 40 abbots from both Benedictine and Cistercian communities a conference on hope, as found in the beautiful and touching story of the Emmaus narrative in the Gospel according to Luke. This was followed by a lively and fraternal discussion. The community of Landévennec welcomes many guests and pilgrims to see their fine museum, demonstrating this area of Brittany in northern France. They have a thriving candy business, known as *Pâtes de Fruits*, made from fresh fruit, and prepared for marketing by the monks themselves. These were visits and events I will long remember with happy and joyful memories of French monasticism.

The month of November marked a number of events here at Sant'Anselmo. On 2 November, All Souls Day, a number of the monks together visited the Roman cemetery where those Benedictines who died in Rome are buried. Our short prayer service was joined by a number of others who were passing by. On Friday evening, 22 November, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity celebrated an ecumenical prayer service, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This document was initially signed on Reformation Day, 31 October 1999, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Over a period of time, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the Anglican Communion came to adhere to the earlier Declaration. Cardinal Kurt Koch presided, different ministers, including Archbishop Farrell from the Pontifical Council, read Scripture readings and orations, and I preached. A particular source of joy was the presence of the joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, under the guidance of the two co-presidents, His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia, Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon, and HE Msgr. Johan Bonny, Bishop of Antwerp (Belgium). Following the service there were refreshments in the cloister and a served-meal followed. Once again, it was an event to be remembered with gratitude and joy. The event was well organized by Father Augustinus Sander, a monk of Maria Laach, who works at the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, and who lives here with us at Sant'Anselmo.

In the course of last Fall, I also twice travelled to the United States in connection with some of my activities which go back to the time before my election as Abbot Primate. The first journey gave me the joy to receive the Monsignor Frederick R. McManus Award from the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, in recognition of my work relating to the translation of the Psalms into English. This translation is now the approved version for the use in liturgy in English-speaking countries. The effort was to change the present translation which was a paraphrase in

many places, now to be more closely in line with the critical versions of the Hebrew and Greek texts. The second journey brought me into the Secretariat for Divine Worship of the US Bishops' Conference, where I have been serving as a Theological Consultant for a number of years. I appreciate these occasions which connect my present position with my past theological activities, and help me to stay in contact with my home country.

For those who have spent some time at Sant'Anselmo, they know it is an old building; and with all old buildings, there is always need for repair and renovation. We have been blessed with the funds from the Foundation Benedict of Switzerland and the work of our Development Director in Europe, Father Markus Muff of Engelberg Abbey, and all the support we have received from them. The list of renovations and repairs is long, but I would like to mention at least a few of the more significant things that have been happening here these past six months. The system of dehumidification in the library has been a major endeavor, involving reconstruction in the Atrium to the church, reconstruction of the church's rainwater drains, and installation of pluvial descendants from the roof of the cloister portico. The renovation and furnishing of Aula 2, along with the rooms 138 and 139 which were in need of serious repair. The acquisition of the authorizations and a collection of estimates for reconstruction of the second floor of the monastic guesthouse were completed. Then there was the reconstruction of the drainage system of the swimming pool and the Benedictine gift shop. It was also necessary to construct a new roof and do some renovation of the janitor's house. There are more items to list, and you can see that Sant'Anselmo remains a place where constant repairs and reconstruction are necessary. By God's grace and the generosity of our benefactors, we have been able to meet these needs.

We are looking forward to the Congress of Abbots in 2020, and the preparation work has started. The Commission of Abbots who will work on the program and plan the workshops, consists of the chairman Abbot Placid Solari, Belmont (USA), Archabbot Donato Ogliari, Montecassino (Italy), Abbot Bernard Lorent, Maredsous (Belgium). Abbot President Jeremias Schröder, St. Ottilien (Germany), is assisting them with his long-standing experience. The more practical side of the Congress is organized by the officials of Sant'Anselmo. Fr Geraldo Gonzales y Lima, our treasurer, has been appointed Coordinator for the Congress in 2020. He has already sent out the first letter with the dates to the Abbot Presidents for distribution, and more letters with information and registration will follow soon.

In connection with the Congress of Abbots, the new *Catalogus* is being prepared. Sr. Anna Eichhorn, Secretary to the Abbot Primate, is responsible to collect and prepare the data. The documents that need to be reviewed have also been sent out to the Abbot Presidents and the superiors of the independent monasteries. We would like to thank all those involved in advance for their collaboration in updating the relevant information for the new *Catalogus*.

In closing, I send to all our monasteries a word of hope as we move into the future. In recent years, both our Church and our world have experienced times of significant instability with regard to the structures of our life, our leadership, and our move forward into the future. As Benedictines, our vow of stability establishes communities of men and women who stay together in spite of being perhaps very different one from the other. In a world that finds itself filled with people who experience alienation, separation, and a general difficulty to relate to others, our life in community can be a witness of peaceful welcome, which grows out of prayer and of living the values found in the Gospels and the Rule of Saint Benedict. Of course, we, too, have conflicts and disagreements in our communities, and some of our members go through difficult phases of alienation, but if we work together to restore reconciliation and unity among ourselves, we feel

the grace of Christ's resurrection which is operative and alive among us. To the Church in which we live, community life stands as a value of unity and peace. In this context, our communities are called to overcome their difficulties and inner divisions in order to stand as a witness of how life can be lived in harmony, peace, creativity, generosity, dialogue, service and gracious welcome.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us be instruments of peace and goodness among one another, and to all whom we meet, all whom we welcome among us, and all for whom we pray each day. And may our celebration of the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ remind us of the profound generosity of God, in taking on our human form and showing us the way to transforming love in our world today. Christmas blessings to all our communities.

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.