



BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO
Curia dell'Abate Primate

17 December 2022

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

Greetings of Advent peace from Sant'Anselmo. It has been awhile since I last wrote a circular letter, going back to Easter of this year. It was important during the time of the pandemic to keep communication within the Confederation and the CIB. These circular letters enabled us to have a better sense of how different monasteries of both men and women were faring during difficult and uncertain times. Now that the pandemic has begun to diminish its effects on our lives, we have moved into the post-pandemic period. So many of the events and commitments of the past two years that have been postponed or cancelled are now seeking to renew requests for meetings. The past six months have been a very busy time for me, both at Sant'Anselmo and within the communities of Benedictine men and women. Doing my best to respond to old and new requests for participation and presence for events in the lives of our communities has been a challenge. I am already committed to events going into 2024. I will do my best to recount some of the highlights of the last six months.

As mentioned earlier, I was asked to serve on the Commission for the Synod 2023. This was a very worthwhile experience, and it was good to have a Benedictine on this working group for the Synod. For the most part, our gatherings included two meetings each month for over a year. These were Meetings within the European Region. There were two international meetings, each lasting four days. These meetings were very enriching in bringing together people of different cultures, spiritual backgrounds, and varying life situations. When Pope Francis introduced the idea of an extension to having a Synod 2024, new Commissions were formed with new members into smaller groups, able to accomplish more in less time. While grateful to be part of the Commission for Synod 2023, I was pleased to have finished my efforts. At the same time, it has been encouraging to see how the whole synodal process has begun to take root throughout the Catholic world. The Church is beginning to think differently about decision-making, future planning, and the vitality which comes from greater involvement within ecclesial organizations. The members of the Commissions included people, all the way from Vatican curial officials, to dioceses, to communities of consecrated men and women, and to the parish structures. My belief is that the synodal journey of the Church will continue to evolve for the next ten years. It is a much larger and complex manner of working than originally conceived.

There have now been a number of ways in which we have begun to see how life has returned to some level of normalcy in the rhythm of our lives. For example for us in Rome, our Monastic Formators' Program was able to have a full session of seven weeks at Sant'Anselmo, followed by six weeks at the Oasi Sacro Cuore (the Sacred Heart Retreat Center) in Assisi. Though there were a few outbreaks of the pandemic during the program, they were dealt with in ways

that allowed this program to continue in a healthy and reasonable manner. This program offers courses which serve to train future formation directors and officials in monastic communities. Also this summer we were able to have our Leadership and the Rule of Saint Benedict program at Sant'Anselmo, guided by our Prior, Father Mauritius Wilde, of Münsterschwarzach Abbey. This program brings monastic personnel involved with administration in their own communities, together with professors from the department of economics of the University of Sankt Gallen in Switzerland. Both the Monastic Formators' Program and Leadership in the Rule of Saint Benedict had 28 participants in each program, good numbers for both learning and exchange. The Leadership in the Rule of Saint Benedict will have another session next summer (2-15 July 2023), while the Monastic Formators' Program takes place every other year (the next in 2024).

On Wednesday, 6 April 2022, the Ateneo Sant'Anselmo joyfully and festively celebrated the conferral of an honorary doctorate on Father Michael Casey of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, a monk of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia. For this occasion, all three Major Superiors of the monastic orders were present: Abbot Bernardus Peeters of the Trappists, originally of Tillbug Abbey in the Netherlands; Abbot Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, of the Cistercians of Common Observance, originally of the Abbey of Hauterive in Switzerland; and Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, originally of Immaculate Conception Abbey in the United States. Also present were Archbishop (now Cardinal) Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery of the Divine Cult, and Ms. Chiara Porro, Ambassador to the Holy See for Australia, from which Fr. Michael Casey comes. The Magisterial Lecture of Father Michael Casey was entitled, "The Rule and the Tradition: A Personal Journey." It was a standing-room only crowd that spilled out into the corridor of the Sala Capitolare.

As Father Michael Casey is so well known throughout the monastic world and beyond, it was appropriate that the monastic university in Rome would bestow this honorary degree on him. He has participated in a number of Benedictine gatherings throughout the world – whether they be meetings of monastic superiors, retreats to both monastic men and women, General Chapters, gatherings of monastic congregations, and university lectures. He has traveled far and wide to share with many people the riches of both the monastic tradition and a spirituality that speaks to people in many walks of life. He has published over 25 books, appreciated and heard in monastic refectories everywhere. Being a prolific writer, he has available over 250 articles on monastic history, spiritual theology, and the earliest monastic traditions. Much of Father Michael's wisdom has come from the living and reflecting on the monastic tradition within his own community and Cistercian Order. He also completed a Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Catholic University of Leuven and a Doctorate in Theology from the University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia. The two *Laudatios* on this occasion were given by Professor Donna Orsuto from the department of Spirituality at the Gregorian University and Reverend Mother Gabriella Masturzo of the Trappistine Abbey of Vitorchiano, in Viterbo, Italy.

In the early days of September, we welcomed the annual convention of the Association of Italian Liturgists. This year there was the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. During these first days, there was an occasion to honor Father Juan Javier Flores of the Abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos, who had served full terms both as President of the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy and then as Rector of our Ateneo. This meeting and anniversary included a papal audience, at which the Holy Father spoke about the two new *motu proprios* on the liturgy, referencing the important continuation of renewal of the liturgy as the "source and summit of our faith," coming from the Second Vatican Council.

With the new academic year which began in October, we welcomed 110 residents, with a good number of young Benedictine monks. Our Prior, Father Mauritius Wilde organized the days of orientation including a day trip to the monastery of Subiaco. Also among the residents are some diocesan clergy, and some new faculty. Among the new residents there are three Armenian monks and three Buddhist monks. The latter we welcomed on request from the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. In a newly established chair, by the generosity of a Foundation, we welcomed Austrian Professor Isabella Bruckner to our faculty for a period of three years. She focuses on *Christian thought and spiritual practice* to help foster our programs. This new endowed professorship drew 21 candidates to apply for this position. An interim and international commission selected the best five candidates who presented themselves at Sant'Anselmo before faculty and students. Associated with this chair are scholarships for excellence that should enable other young scholars at Sant'Anselmo to participate in this endeavor of Dr. Bruckner. The hope of these scholarships is to foster academic work at Sant'Anselmo that will be fruitful for the societies of our contemporary age. This initiative is a part of a general and on-going orientation for the mission of our Benedictine University in Rome.

Some of the other programs within the Confederation have been able to meet again. For example, after a few attempts to meet, the MID/DIM (Monastic interreligious Dialogue) was able to gather at the Trappist Abbey of Acey in France. Father William Skudlarek of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville directs this program, having given his enthusiastic participation now for over two decades. The dialogues with our Muslim brothers and sisters continue from several years ago, before the pandemic. There are any variety of topics which are helpful in coming to know our various religious backgrounds and beliefs. For example, this time we talked about the meaning and implications of suffering in our religious traditions. As one can imagine, each person brings to the table of discussion the ways in which suffering has been experienced in both their personal lives and in the history of their religious traditions. As suffering is such a part of every person's lives, there is a rich spiritual belief of how it can be medicinal, purifying, corrective, and an occasion of both faith and personal growth.

Early in September, we had our annual *Synod of the Abbot Presidents* meeting at Subiaco. Meeting there is always a place to touch our Benedictine roots from the early time that Saint Benedict came in search of God's mysterious call in his life. It was an especially interesting experience as we were able to hear from Abbot Maksymilian Nawara of the Annunciation Congregation, where the Benedictine Confederation has a monastery in the Ukraine; and he serves as its superior. Despite the difficult situation from the continued Russian bombardment, the community remains firm in its insistence to continue the monastic life there, and also resolute to be of help to many people who come to them in their needs. Monasteries have assisted them with financial help through these recent months. If a community wishes to make a contribution to their efforts, Abbot Maksymilian gratefully receives it. But rather than sending money through the mail, I give here the email of Abbot Maksymilian to see how best to assist with financial help: max.benedyktyni@gmail.com. Our prayerful remembrance of them is deeply appreciated. Beyond our men's monastery, there are two monasteries of Benedictine women in the Ukraine. Abbot Maksymilian's efforts will reach these other two communities.

September was a busy month in which I gave an address at the General Chapters of the Norbertines, Trappists, and Cistercians. Also in September, we had a meeting of our Advisory Board for our University. We had been able to meet by Zoom, but this Fall we were able to meet in-person. As all the Pontifical Faculties in Rome have boards which are made up of members that bring a variety of talents and gifts to the service of our universities, our board brings together

Abbots from different Benedictine Congregations, and also laity and clergy whose work brings them into contact with Higher Education, finances, marketing, curriculum development, and legal procedures. Our Board is only five years old, but we have made significant progress with our present administration, under the Rector, Father Bernhard Eckerstorfer of Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria, and our outside consultants.

In October we welcomed the Board Members of the Foundation Benedict, based at the monasteries of Engelberg and Fischingen in Switzerland. This Foundation, from its beginning, has been under the leadership of Father Markus Muff of Engelberg Abbey. Their work of both friend-raising and fund-raising enables us to carry out important construction and renovation projects for the monastery building at Sant'Anselmo. With the present financial situations in our world, financial support for Sant'Anselmo is very important, and enables us to look to the future with hope, confidence and inner strength.

Most recently at the end of November, the Board of AIM (Alliance for International Monasticism) had its annual meeting at Ampleforth Abbey, near York, in northern England. Under its president, Father Jean-Pierre Longeat of the Abbey of Saint Martin at Ligugé and secretary, Sister Christine Conrath of the Abbey at Jouarre, we received the annual reports of various places in the emerging world, distribution of its funds to the filed requests, and a review of our Constitutions. Both Father Jean-Pierre and Sister Christine have done an excellent job in giving AIM a path to follow into the future. As a member of the Board, Abbess Anna Brennan and her community at Stanbrook warmly welcomed us for the celebration of Mass, a meeting of the Board, and a delicious noon meal. Though the days were long and intense, much was accomplished for the good of those served by AIM. In December we welcomed at Sant'Anselmo the 80th anniversary celebration of the founding of *Institut des Sources Chrétiennes*, a bilingual collection of patristic texts that has served as a foundation in the renewal of the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, particularly the office of Readings/Vigils. It was begun in 1942 by the three French Jesuits Fr. Jean Daniélou, Fr. Claude Mondésert, and Fr. Henri-Marie de Lubac. Their work continues to this day, drawing about 60 members of this celebration. This program was organized and animated by our director of Monastic Studies and Subprior at Sant'Anselmo, Father Fernando Rivas of the Abbey of Luján in Argentina.

As we draw closer to the feast of the Lord's birth, let us remember those in our world who suffer the pain of war, hunger, and violence. As we celebrate the feast of God-with-us, may Christ make his divine presence known and felt by all of us. And may these final days of Advent lead to a hope-filled celebration of the great Christmas Mystery.

With best wishes for God's blessings of peace and light,

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

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.