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## Mount St Benedict Newsletter Christmas 2012



Painting of the abbey church by Shu Jun Lin for the centenary of the monastery (06 October 2012)

*The Abbot and community express sincere thanks and appreciation for the many ways in which you have shown your support and solidarity over the past year. They are particularly grateful to all who assisted in making their one hundredth anniversary celebrations such a spirit-filled occasion. They continue to give thanks to God for you. Thank you!*



Mount St Benedict  
Newsletter  
Christmas 2012

On the week-end of the sixth and seventh of October 2012, the monks of Mount St Benedict thanked God for one hundred years of sacred space bequeathed to them and handed down from one generation of monks to another. In several of the congratulatory messages that were received for the centenary and in several of the speeches delivered at the centenary celebrations, including those of the archbishop, the prime minister and the acting president of the Republic, Mount St Benedict was referred to as a sacred place. A sacred place is one that is associated with the divine. It is synonymous with holiness.

In her address on the occasion of the launching of the Mount St Benedict anniversary DVD, Prime Minister The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar described the abbey as “A stairway to heaven.” This was also the reaction of Dom Mayeul de Caigny when he first set foot on this spot on the Feast of St Anthony of Egypt, 17 January 1912. According to the early history of the monastery by Dom Odo van der Heijdt, Around the hut there was a clearing and the Abbot, who had an open eye for the beauties of nature, was at once enchanted with the panorama that unfolded before his eyes. The view took the Abbot by storm, conquered him Dom Mayeul was impressed by the solitude and solemn stillness of the place. He was enchanted by its natural beauty, and refreshed by the coolness of the water.” Like our Patriarch Jacob, Dom Mayeul knew instinctively that “God is in this place” (Genesis 28:16).

The celebration of Christmas is a reminder that the entire world is a sacred place because of the fact that God has made direct contact with earth through the incarnation: “God is in this place”. As we celebrate this season, let us honour and preserve the earth that we inhabit by recognizing its sacrality. What Mount St Benedict is said to be a sacred place, the entire world is also, only if we would allow that to be.

Abbot and Community

## TO BE SEEN IN TWENTY THIRTEEN

The fourth abbot of Mount St Benedict and the first ever Trinidad-born Benedictine abbot will complete his tenth year as Bishop of Georgetown, Guyana. Most Reverend Bishop Francis Alleyne was appointed by the Holy See on 10 November 2003. We wish him God's continued blessings in his role as shepherd of the flock entrusted to him.

Abbot John Pereira, who succeeded Bishop Francis Alleyne, will complete his tenth year as abbot. He was elected fifth abbot of the monastery on 15 November 2003 and blessed by Archbishop Edward Gilbert on 27 December 2003. Abbot John would also celebrate his twentieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood on 27 June 2013.

Frs. Augustine Schreurs and Cuthbert van de Sande will both celebrate their sixty-fifth anniversary of monastic profession on 16 May 2013. They both arrived in Trinidad as young men in their early 20's from their native Holland on 19 February 1947. During their youth, they had experienced the hardships of the Second World War and this has helped to shape their steadfast resilience in their dedicated life as monks. We thank God for their generous service in building up God's kingdom here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Bro Rupert Alexis will attain the age of biblical strength when he celebrates his eightieth birthday on 18 October 2013. He is well-known for his sporting activities at the mount, particularly in the area of swimming. As sports master at the Abbey School for several years, he nurtured the qualities of discipline and fair play among many of the students who continue to be grateful today for his guidance. He is the founder of the Abbey Aqua and Lasses Swimming Club at the abbey. We wish him well in his monastic life at the abbey.

2013 will be the year of two major celebrations for the third abbot of Mount St Benedict and the first Caribbean Benedictine abbot, Fr. Hildebrand

Greene. On 15 January 2013, he will complete his fifty-fifth year of monastic profession and on 16 April 2013 he will celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday. Born in 1938 in Georgetown, Guyana, he joined the abbey at the youthful age of 18 years. He has remained committed and faithful to the Benedictine way of life. Facing some health challenges at present, he continues to offer himself for service to the community and to the pilgrims. May The Lord grant him continued joy and peace as he labours in the vineyard of the Kingdom!

Fr. Christopher Theunissen will also mark two important dates in the coming year. On 16 January 2013 he will celebrate his golden jubilee of monastic profession and on 17 August 2013 he will mark his forty-fifth year of priestly ordination. Born in 1941 in Holland, he also came to the monastery at a young age. He has served in various areas of the abbey's activities both within the monastery and outside, where he worked in several parishes throughout the country. For some years now he has devoted himself to the life within the abbey. In an October 2012 interview to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Trinidad and Tobago, he referred to the monastery as "home". We wish him good health and blessings as he continues on the path of monastic life.



Left to right: Frs. Christopher, Augustine, Cuthbert and Prior Odo (The four Dutch monks at the abbey)

## AN ODE TO FR ODO

"Today (28 September 2012), Dear Lord, I am 82 and there's much I haven't done. I hope, Dear Lord, You'll let me live until I'm 83. But then if I haven't finished all I want to do, would you let me stay awhile until I'm 84? So many places I want to go, so very much to see. Do You think You could manage to make it 85? The world is changing very fast, there is much in store, and I'd like it very much to live until I'm 86. And if by then I'm still alive, I'd like to stay till 87. More planes will be in the air, so I'd really like to stick, and see what happens to the world when I am 88. I know, Dear Lord, it's much to ask, and it must be nice in heaven, but I would really like to stay until I'm 89. I know by then I won't be fast, and sometimes will be late, but it would be so pleasant, to be around at 90. I will have seen many things and had a wonderful time. So, I'm sure that I'll be willing to leave at... maybe."

## MONASTIC SOLIDARITY

The abbey is very grateful to two of our sister Benedictine communities within our congregation, who assisted us directly during the past year. During the months of June and July 2012, Fr Andrew Nugent from Glenstal Abbey in Ireland lent his support in our Parlour Ministry and in our Pastoral care of the pilgrims. Fr Matthew Rios from St Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California, was with us in September and early October for the same purpose. We are very grateful to Abbot Patrick Hederman of Glenstal and Abbot Damien Toilolo of Valyermo who both responded positively to our requests for assistance in these areas. As a centre of pilgrimage and because of the growing pastoral demands on the abbey, this form of assistance is greatly appreciated by both the monks and the pilgrims alike.

## FROM GUAYA... TO THE MOUNT



Bro. Richard Jones on the day of his monastic profession

Brother Richard Jones is seen here after his monastic profession at the Abbey Church on Tuesday 17 January 2012. He was born in Guayaguayare on 16 October 1975 and was led to the monastery after paying a visit with his parish priest and a group of young people from Mayaro in 2009. At present, he is pursuing a degree in Theology at the University of the West Indies. He likes singing and composing music. He assists in the Sacristy and the Library and also serves as Cantor during Holy Mass and the Divine Office.

In his homily, Abbot John underlined the significance of the date, the Feast of St Antony of the desert. It was on that day in 1912 that the founder of Mount St Benedict first set foot on the site and was immediately captivated by the solitude and stillness of the place. Exactly one hundred years later to the date, Bro Richard is declaring his intention to continue his life-long search for God in the same place.



Waiting for Morning Prayer (see article on page 3)

### CONGRESS OF ABBOTS

The World Congress of Benedictine abbots, held every four years in Rome, took place at the Benedictine College of Sant' Anselmo from 17 - 25 September 2012. There were approx. 300 participants. Abbot Notker Wolf of Germany was re-elected as abbot primate for another four years. There were two keynote speakers: Professor Michael Hochschild presenting his research on the viability of Benedictine monasteries and Fr Michael Casey, OCSO, on autonomy in Benedictine life. In addition there were workshops on various aspects of church and monastic life. These included Benedictine identity, stress and burnout, management in monasteries, ecumenism, new directions for inter-monastic dialogue, relationship with Benedictine women and new forms of Benedictine presence in society. As usual there was much discussion about Sant' Anselmo and its changing role. There was an opportunity during the Congress to visit sites of Benedictine interest. Abbot John went to Subiaco to visit the cave of St Benedict. He also took the opportunity during the congress to show the commemorative DVD of Mount St Benedict produced by jcd & associates to mark the centenary of the abbey. It was very well received by the abbots. Copies of the DVD were presented to the abbot primate and the abbot president of the Congregation of the annunciation.

### GENERAL CHAPTER IN ASSISI

About 50 participants, representing some 30 monasteries from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and U.S.A. came together in Assisi for the quadrennial General Chapter of the Congregation of the Annunciation to discuss and exchange ideas relating to several topics concerning monastic life. Each day we had 3 sessions, often followed by small group discussions. The gathering, which lasted from 26 Sept. to 05 Oct., included a guided tour of Assisi with visits to the basilicas and tombs of Saints Claire and Francis on Wed. 28th Sept. and visits to places of interest in the life of St. Francis: Greccio and Fonte Colombo on Tues. 02 Oct.

I now share briefly on two of the presentations. The first talk by Dr. Isabelle Jonveaux, dealt with the economics of sobriety (moderation) for present-day monasticism. In a second talk she elaborated on daily sobriety/simplicity as a new form of monastic asceticism. Fr. Athanasius Polag, OSB, dealt mainly with possessions in the monastic setting today. These were followed by lively discussions in groups and reports to the assembly provoking further sharing.

Each delegate also gave a report on the state of their community. There were a number of voting sessions on monasteries who had requested to either become independent monasteries or who wished to be admitted to our congregation. All of them were accepted with overwhelming majority. The incumbent president of the congregation, Brother Ansgar, was also re-elected for a further term of 6 years.

I had to leave the meeting two days before it ended, in order to be back in time for the centenary celebrations of our Abbey. Every blessing to all for a holy Christmas and a blessed New Year!

*Fr. Christopher Theunissen,  
delegate of The Abbey, Mount St. Benedict,  
Trinidad & Tobago*

### BRO JOE MOVES ON

Joseph Basil Perez was born in Matura in the County of St. Andrew, Trinidad on 14 June 1925. He joined the monastery on 02 February 1947 and was professed as a monk on 04 February 1950. A skilled craftsman, Bro Joseph was principal of St Bede Vocational School for 25 years.

His life as a monk radiated joy and commitment. He was fond of writing and wrote several booklets over the years. "The Woodworker", one of his publications, summarised his holistic approach to spirituality.

As Sub-Prior of the abbey he was always a trusted member of the Abbot's council. He assisted the poor and disadvantaged of John John at St Martin's Welfare Association. His teaching encompassed not only cabinet-making, but also Human Relations Skills and Religion.

He was a much sought-after counsellor in our Parlour Ministry for several of his final years. God has blessed the Mount with a wonderful human being and he will be sorely missed. He passed away peacefully at the Living Water Hospice in Port of Spain on Saturday 12 May 2012. His funeral took place on Thursday 17 May at the Abbey. May he rest in peace!



Brother Joseph Perez, OSB (1925 - 2012)

### ALL CREATURES, GREAT AND SMALL, THE LORD GOD MADE THEM ALL...

Over the last year or so, we have noticed an enormous explosion in the winged population around the Monastery. Every morning, while we pray our Morning Prayer, grey and olive tanagers fly through the church singing their own brand of psalmody and feeding on the insects on the fluorescent lights. It is not unknown that they leave their signature-numbers on the page of some unsuspecting breviary, or the pate of a monk astonished by their boldness!

The ground doves in their livery of Carmel-brown, emerge from their nests in the thick bougainvillea hedge outside the Refectory and boldly walk about on the floor looking for crumbs of bread. When they are shooed away, they perch on the wrought-iron gate behind the door and wait for the next opportunity. Some are so bold - or, perhaps so tame - that they perch on the cover of the bread bin with a knowing air, as much as to say: "We know what's inside this bin, and we have patience to wait until it is opened!" Some of the Brethren also place over-ripe bananas along the wall so as to "feed the hungry".

The *Wood Slaves*, as these house lizards are called in Trinidad, emerge from their camouflaged hiding places to feast on what insects the birds have left behind. Sometimes, when disturbed they freeze instead of darting for cover, and it is difficult to tell them apart from the colour of the wall. I wish they would eat up the little black bees that hover and float annoyingly at one's ears or alight behind one's glasses and in one's hair during our Prayer in Choir! Call in the Kiskadees! With a flash of yellow, white, black and brown, these gobble up any buccaneering bee intent on her sweet plunder! O that they could be introduced into Choir to deal with the hovering black bees!

*All of these look to You / To give them their food in due season. / You give it, they gather it up: / You open your hand, they have their fill.*

*[Ps 104(103): 27-28]*

*Brother Paschal Jordan, OSB*

# Mount St. Benedict Centennial Celebrations: 06 to 07 October 2012

