

Mount St Benedict Newsletter

Christmas 2017



Sunrise at Mount St Benedict

“From the rising of the sun to its setting a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name...” (Eucharistic Prayer III). Each morning the monks of Mount St Benedict greet the rising of the sun with the pure sacrifice of Holy Mass. It is the *raison d'être* of the monastic life. In his 2015 Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis encourages us to praise God at all times for our common home and to care for it. In addition to the seven traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy, Pope Francis has proposed an eighth. As a spiritual work of mercy, we are called to contemplate the world as God has made it. As a corporal work of mercy, “care for our common home” requires of us to resist the logic of violence and selfishness that is so prevalent in our society today. Over the year 2017, the monks of Mount St Benedict have sought to pay more attention to our common home. We have rejuvenated our water harvesting and distribution network to ensure that all those who visit the Mount and live in its shadow would have an uncontaminated and abundant supply of fresh drinking water, which as Pope Francis states is “an issue of primary importance since it is indispensable for human life...” The monks have planted additional trees along the roadside leading to the monastery, which will have positive effects on the ecological and aesthetic wellbeing of our common home. And we have reformulated our popular PAX brand yogurt to ensure the continued health of consumers. As we enter the New Year 2018, we wish you, in the spirit of the Christmas season, a posture of gentleness towards our common home. May God bless you!

Abbot and Community

2018 CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate our previous abbot, Most Rev. Bishop Francis Alleyne, who will complete his fifteenth year as Bishop of Georgetown, Guyana. He was appointed Bishop on 10 November 2003. We wish him continued blessings in his role as shepherd of the flock in Guyana.

Fr. John Pereira was elected as the fifth abbot of Mount St. Benedict on 15 November 2003 and was blessed in the abbey church on 27 December 2003. We pray that the Lord may continue to strengthen him on his fifteenth year as abbot. On 27 June 2018, Abbot John Pereira will be celebrating his twenty-fifth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. He asks for God's blessings and perseverance in the Lord's vineyard.

Our major celebration will be the seventieth anniversary of the monastic profession of Fr. Augustine Schreurs on 16 May 2018. He is ninety-three years of age and came to Trinidad from his home in the Netherlands as a young man in his twenties. God has blessed our community with a dedicated soul who has given two-thirds of his life in monastic living. May God continue to bless him with peace and dedication to the spiritual quest!

Brother Rupert Alexis will be celebrating his eighty-fifth birthday on 18 October 2018. He continues to be a quiet presence in the monastery as he grows gracefully in the Lord's service. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless him with good health and holiness.

Two celebrations will be awaiting Fr. Christopher Theunissen in 2018. On 16 January 2018 he will complete fifty-five years as a professed monk of Mount St Benedict. On 17 August 2018 he will celebrate his fiftieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Our prayer for him is that the Lord will bless him with good health and continued perseverance in the monastic life. Ad multos annos!

WELCOME, BROTHER ANTONY!

Our monastery was graced with the presence of a Benedictine monk from Kristo Buase Monastery in Ghana, Africa. Brother Antony Buaful was invited by Abbot John to assist the abbey for three years and to pursue the theological programme of studies at the Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs. He arrived on 31 August 2017 and has already begun his studies at the Seminary. His presence has had a positive effect on the brethren and Brother Antony has fitted in well with our monastic rhythm. We give him our full support and we pray for success in his theological studies.



Brother Antony celebrating his first birthday at the Mount

FR CUTHBERT VAN DE SANDE, RIP
(1924 – 2017)

On Saturday 02 September 2017, the Abbey Church of Mount St. Benedict was packed to capacity with persons from all walks of life. They had come together for the funeral Mass of their dearly beloved friend and mentor, Fr Cuthbert van de Sande. This massive demonstration of popular support was a graphic testimony of the way in which this monk and priest had touched the lives of so many people. He was a people's man.

Johannes Andreas van de Sande was born on 18 August 1924 in Holland to Gerrit and Cornelia van de Sande. Jan, as he was called, belonged to a large Catholic family and grew up in a farming district. His teen years were conditioned by the Second World War and the German occupation of Holland. These years were difficult ones for Jan as he sought to balance his academic education, his work on the farm, his need to protect himself from the Gestapo who were capturing young boys to work in the German factories, and the difficulty to obtain food, especially in the winter as there was often no electricity or oil.

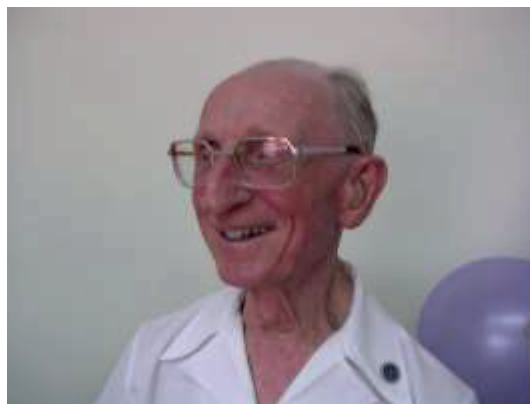
Jan pursued a call to serve God in the Religious Life. Through his encounter with Fr. Radboud van de Plas, an elderly missionary priest, who once lived as a monk in Trinidad, he was inspired to become a Benedictine monk at Mount St Benedict in Tunapuna. On 19 February 1947, he landed on the shores of Trinidad and Tobago to begin his monastic dream.

He was given the name, Cuthbert, in the monastery, and made his monastic profession on 15 May 1948. Ordained to the priesthood on 24 February 1954, he soon became a very active and valuable member of the monastery. Seeing the need for the workers in the monastery to manage their income more effectively, he founded the Mount St. Benedict Credit Union. He served both as Vice Principal and Principal of the Abbey School and soon became an active scouter as

leader of the 2nd Mount St. Benedict Troop.

Fr. Cuthbert taught West Indian History in the Abbey School and later Church History at the Seminary for the formation of priests. Fr. Cuthbert has made valuable contributions in almost every area of the monastery's activities. As Kitchen Master, Spiritual Counsellor, Financial Manager, Transport Manager, Book Shop Director and Prior, He was a "giant" of a man in every respect. A legacy that he has left behind is the famous "PAX" brand Yogurt. Fr. Cuthbert is the founder of "PAX" Yogurt, and has brought it up to a quality that can compete with any imported or local brand of yogurt on the market.

Fr. Cuthbert will always be remembered as a man with a compassionate heart, a sense of humour and a deep prayer life. He was a "giant" of a man, but always humble and attentive to the needs of the other. He died peacefully at the abbey at 2:45 pm on Monday 28 August 2017 at the age of 93 years. May God grant him the fullness of joy in His presence!



The ever-smiling, forever positive Fr. Cuthbert, OSB

"In order to allow his monastic vocation to unfold, Fr. Cutty used two tools: determination and humour. He looked on the bright side of life and never allowed himself to be bogged down by the negatives around him." *(from the funeral Homily of Abbot John Pereira)*

PAX YOGURT MAKING NEW STRIDES

In addition to a dedicated team of management and workers in the factory, Pax Yogurt now has at least two patrons in the heavens. The founder and inspiration behind the product, Fr. Cuthbert van de Sande, went to enjoy his heavenly reward on 28 August 2017. A loyal friend and director of the business, Mr. Brendan Garcia, had also gone to his eternal reward on 19 July 2017.



For several months, the Pax Yogurt team has been doing research to improve the brand. From December 2017 two new sizes of containers were introduced: 10 oz. and 22 oz. A brand new label has also been designed which has more detailed information about the product. The traditional flavours have however been maintained: natural, almond, guava, passion fruit, pineapple, soursop, strawberry and vanilla.

High quality live active yogurt cultures, rich in probiotics, with excellent health benefits to the consumer, have been included in the formula. These are as follows: ***streptococcus thermophilus, lactobacillus bulgaricus, lactobacillus rhamnosus and a selected strain of lactobacillus plantarum.*** Pax Yogurt is available at the Pax Abbey Shop on the Mount, at all branches of Massy Stores, Xtra Foods, Tru Valu, JTA and more

PAX YOGURT replenishes calcium in the body, assists in the prevention of breast and colon cancer, assists in food digestion, and is useful in combating nausea / upset stomach (e.g. after chemo, in pregnancy). PAX YOGURT is within the diabetic sugar level range and cholesterol free and thus a good food for the heart.

The Pax Yogurt members of staff are grateful for the continuing support of the monks of the monastery of Mount St Benedict and the support of the loyal customers. They are also quite conscious of the presence of Fr. Cuthbert, who appears to be even more active now than when he was alive, seeking at all times the welfare of the health-conscious citizens of our beloved twin-island State of Trinidad and Tobago.

THE PAX ABBEY SHOP LIMITED *(Religious Gift Shop & Cafeteria)*

From the earliest years of Mount St Benedict, there has always been a shop offering religious items to the Pilgrims. This is being done more professionally today since the establishment of The Pax Abbey Shop at the Mount. The dedicated members of staff ensure that our pilgrims are served seven (7) days per week, under the management of Mrs. Nimblett and Mrs. Williams. We provide our patrons with a wide selection of religious, motivational and inspirational books, candles, statues, jewellery and gift items for all religious occasions especially Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and Weddings. One can also visit our Cafeteria for light refreshments, local sweets and snacks and to find our high quality and specially branded “PAX” honey and yogurt.

We pride ourselves on affording patrons from all walks of life the opportunity to visit us and take with them the inspirations, wisdom and inner peace they hope to gain from their selections whilst patronising our Gift Shop and Cafeteria.

2017 has been a blessed year for us and we hope that 2018 will allow us the opportunity to offer much more to our patrons.

BRO. RICHARD DIAZ MAKES SOLEMN PROFESSION

Family members, friends and well-wishers joined the monks of Mount St Benedict to welcome Brother Richard Edward Diaz, O.S.B., as a full member of the community of monks. Wednesday 17 May 2017 at 5:00 pm during the celebration of Holy Mass at the Abbey Church, Brother Richard made his Solemn Profession as a Benedictine monk. It was indeed a day of joy and celebration, which fittingly spilled over onto the monastery grounds thereafter with a tasty meal and fellowship.

Monsignor Christian Pereira, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, graced the occasion with his presence, together with several priests and religious, including Fr. Clyde Harvey, who at the time was residing at the Abbey. He has since been elevated to the Bishopric, being assigned to the Diocese of St. George's, Grenada. Msgr. Kenneth Spence, a close friend of Brother Richard, led the Congregation in the General Intercessions, and Sister Phyllis Wharfe, SJC, proclaimed the first reading.

In his homily, Abbot John referred to the writings of John Cassian (360-430), one of the spiritual architects of the monastic edifice. Abbot John urged Brother Richard to keep before him at all times both the end ("the kingdom of heaven") and the goal ("purity of heart") of the monastic way of life.

Born just before the end of the Second World War, Richard grew up in St. Joseph Village, San Fernando, within the warmth of a close-knit family. He was the fifth of six children born to Pat and Obdulia Diaz. Throughout his entire life he yearned for the peace which was such a foreign and forgotten word during the World War. It was in the spirituality of St. Benedict, a man who had also lived in turbulent times that he was finally able to find a similar quest for that elusive virtue of peace (PAX). By committing himself to the Benedictine monastery of Mount St. Benedict on the hills overlooking the Caroni Plains, Richard continues his quest to "seek peace and pursue it" (Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue, v. 17).

We wish Brother Richard perseverance, peace and joy in the monastic way of life. May God bless him!



Brother Richard is being questioned by the abbot



Brother Richard calls upon the mercy of God to support him

A WAY FORWARD – BENEDICTINE COMMUNITY IN MOVEMENT



Anthony Holder at the Congress with Fr Martin Birrel, OSB, from Pluscarden Abbey on his right, and Fr Mark Hargreaves, OSB, from Prinknash Abbey on his left

November 4th to 10th 2017 marked our 4th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates. The Benedictine community, that is, monks, nuns, sisters and oblates worldwide, met at the “Fraterna Domus”, in Rome, Italy as a family to strengthen, uplift, support and share with and minister to each other. We got to meet again or for the first time, and discover or rediscover our common ancestry and lineages of monasteries and communities stemming from holy father, Abbot St. Benedict, how these lineages took form and shape through the centuries, and how their mission (ora et labora) had impacted the countries, communities and context, in which we live.

There were four outstanding events at this year’s congress. First to note is the thanksgiving and farewell to the father and mastermind of these congresses our former Abbot Primate, Notker Wolf O.S.B. as we also welcomed our new Abbot Primate to this experience - Abbot Gregory Polan O.S.B.. The other was in keeping with this year’s theme: ‘A Way Forward – Benedictine Community in Movement’ with major emphasis on ‘The changing landscape of Oblate Life around the world’ where the online community called

‘Monasteries of the heart’ was introduced by our wise and insightful sister Joan Chittister O.S.B., the keynote speaker who has been labouring assiduously in the area of Benedictine spirituality and social justice. She was among those warmly welcomed. Our third and fourth major events were two visits on the same day. The first visit to the Vatican at the Pope’s Wednesday audience at which he acknowledged our presence and the other visit was to Sant’ Anselmo Abbey, representatives of which were also at the congress.

Pope Francis’ recent encyclical “Laudato Si” set the tone as the worldwide Benedictine family took this opportunity together to pray and reflect in communion with each other and Almighty God. Workshops also allowed participants to examine and discuss the relevance of our lives and witness in relation to God’s word as perceived through the Rule of St. Benedict. It is through this rule with the assistance of the Lectio Divina and meditation sessions that we sort to embrace some of the challenges presented in the encyclical – 1) to be good stewards of creation in an abused planet for example being careful with waste disposal, 2) to live lives of simplicity, such as purchasing, in a healthy state of mind and body, only what is really needed to avoid impulse buying, 3) silence and contemplation in a world of chaos, idolized entertainment, digital noise and consumerism, and 4) to be peacemakers in a world of terrorism, violence, war, refugee crises and religious fanaticism.

The World Congress of Benedictine Oblates 2017 was an opportunity when we examined practical ways and means of forward movement, for the oblate communities worldwide, the Christian and the child of God that can impact the world around us in such a manner that the “Word” becomes flesh and that in all things God may be glorified.

by Anthony Holder, Oblate Coordinator

(Anyone interested in the Oblates of Mount St Benedict Abbey, can contact our Coordinator, Anthony Holder at 664-8192 or 314-8986)

NOVEMBER POEM

I

These days,
when dark sets early,
swinging down the apron-strings of morning
and clinging to the hem of day...
When the mists, emerging
naked from the forest
dash down the hillsides
and plunge
headlong into the river...
When the salty scent
of boiled corn bubbling
at every village corner,
and the lingering lights
and the acrid oil in
discarded deyas
signal
the end of ripe October...
The *TIME* is not yet!

II

These days,
when the tramp of the Saints
and the march of the Dead
echo over the land,
their voices
insistent,
summoning us away
from the clatter and clang and jangle
of frenzied dreams
and shattered relationships
and crepitus of gun
and bone and lung...
The *TIME* is at hand!

III

These days,
we too are handed over
already
- "Lord, is not this the *TIME*?" -
to those who would confine us
to the catafalque, define us
more tautly, delate us,

hate us
for breathing
more lately
towering thoughts, flying supremely freely...
Prepare!
(Revenge, I say! The blood of the dead, I say!)
Prepare! No!
(But justice, I say! The bellies of the starving, I
say!)
Prepare no defence!
Lord, is not *this* the
TIME?

Bro. Paschal Jordan, O.S.B.

A CALLING

*You emptied yourself / You came like a slave,
for my wretched self / Your glory You gave.
Enveloped in mud / You stretched our Your hands,
You poured out Your blood / and changed all my
plans,*

*But, what does it matter, / if, from ever before
at one with the Father / there is oneness no more?
Eternally begotten, / of Christ, it is true!
unique, unforgotten, / but so am I too.*

*The Father begets me, / each day as His son.
Today I'm begotten / called now to be one.
And, what sense does it make, / if the Virgin gave
birth
to the Man of the lake / if today there's a dearth?*

*Continually begotten, / continually begetting,
my life as a Priest / both in gift and in giving.
"In persona Christi", / I'm now called to act,
your Priest I must be / please fill what I lack!*

*O God, hear my prayer / on this special day,
please show you're there / "in persona
Ecclesiae"!*

*And, if my priesthood means / anything at all
it means being begotten, begetting, / emptying for
all!*

Abbot John Pereira, O.S.B.

(written for his Ordination 27 June 1993)

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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 continue to give thanks to God for you. Thank you!



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