

# Mount St Benedict

Newsletter

## Christmas 2014



The Bells of Mount St Benedict are heard not only at Christmas but all through the year

One of the features of Christmas is the ringing of bells. It heralds the birth of the new born Christchild. The sound of the bells delights our children and signals a time of joy and happiness. Bells are also a way of welcoming in the New Year. The bells create a spirit of excitement and expectancy. Bells are special. In the monastery, the bells are an integral part of our daily lives. They are the call to prayer. The call to prayer from the Minaret punctuates the life of the faithful follower of Islam with the consciousness of God from dawn to after sunset. The sound of the bells summons the faithful monk to prayer and to a continual consciousness of God. But not only is the faithful monk aroused at the sound of the bells, so too are the hundreds of pilgrims who frequent this Mount of prayer on a daily basis and the surrounding neighbours who also hear their sound from afar. "On hearing the signal for prayer, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand ..."(St Benedict). Today, when we all seem so caught up in our own little worlds of satisfying the demands of the market place, there is a need to punctuate our daily lives with moments when we can stop and attend to the consciousness of God. One day, when we have become so absorbed in the mystery of the Incarnation – the permeation of the entire Universe with the presence of God – there will no longer be any need for bells or muezzin. But that time has not yet come. Now we still need reminders. We need Bell Towers and Minarets. Let us take time to listen and to pray. We may not be able to do so always. But at least for now let us listen to the bells and pray. For the Joy of our children at the sound of the bells is also the Joy of the Gospel.

Abbot and Community

## **TWENTY-FIFTEEN DATES TO NOTE**

By a decree of the Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome, dated 06 March 1915, Mount St Benedict was raised to the dignity of a conventual priory, and Dom Mayeul de Caigny became its first Conventual Prior. Twenty-fifteen will mark one hundred years since this historic event.

Bishop Francis Alleyne, OSB, Georgetown, Guyana, the former abbot of Mount St Benedict, has two major celebrations. His thirtieth anniversary of priestly ordination will take place on 07 July 2015 and his fortieth anniversary of monastic profession will take place on 08 December 2015. We wish him continued blessings in his role as Bishop.

Birthday greetings to Abbot John Pereira who attains the age of sixty years on 12 July 2015!

Bro Tony Badri celebrates his fifteenth year of monastic commitment on 15 August 2015. He continues to spearhead our thrust to maintain the physical structures of the abbey with his dedicated maintenance team. As Master of Ceremonies at the abbey, he is also committed to the liturgical life of the monastery. We congratulate him!

## **CONGRATULATIONS**

Congratulations are in order for Fr Augustine and Fr Cuthbert, who both turned ninety years in 2014. We wish them both continued health and blessings for many more years to come. God bless!

## **NIGERIAN MONK AT THE MOUNT**

A most wonderful Christmas to you all! I am Br. Matthias Ukpebitere OSB of St Benedict's Monastery, Ewu, Nigeria and I am eagerly looking forward to celebrating my first Christmas here in Mt. St. Benedict Abbey, Trinidad and Tobago which, incidentally, will be the first outside the shores of my beloved country.

I arrived here on 18 August, 2014 for three years of theological study under the sponsorship of the Abbey. This has been of great support to my monastery. As some would recall it was at the Mount that Fr. Vincent Mordi OSB, whom I accompanied in 2007, came to recuperate shortly after his renal transplant. Since my arrival, the experience has been wonderful and the hospitality excellent. Benedictines sure have a special kind of hospitality.

The relentless witness of the abbey to the Gospel message has been marked by doggedness for over a century. The impact of the abbey is felt strongly in ministering to the large number of pilgrims that flock to its shelter on a daily basis from around the country and beyond. Monasteries around the world have always been a haven for spiritual encounters more so in our contemporary world saturated with all forms of delights and allurements. It is consoling to observe the immense sacrifice made daily by the monks, whose strength has depleted greatly from lack of vocations, in meeting the spiritual needs of the pilgrims. It is a privilege to be at Mount St Benedict "the school of the Lord's service" to witness the humble act of total self-giving. Yes! The harvest is indeed plenty but the labourers are few. May the Lord of the harvest send worthy servants into his vineyard and may he continue to sustain us and keep us ever faithful to his love. Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year!



Brother Matthias Ukpebitere in the Library

**FR ODO VAN DER HEIJDT, RIP**  
**(1930 – 2014)**

“He may have been born in the Netherlands, he may have had a Dutch passport, and he may have been getting a Pension from the Dutch Government. However, if you really wanted to know where he came from, where his heart truly lay, you simply had to tell him that the West Indies cricket team lost again and then you would have understood. I think that he suffered more pain towards the end of his life from the miserable state of West Indies Cricket than from any physical or medical complaint. He may have been born in Holland, but he was, to borrow a phrase from David Rudder, a true ‘Trini To De Bone’. This is the man we celebrate today: Fr Odo van der Heijdt, former Prior of Mount St Benedict and one who was always there for the people. We are talking about a man who gave 60 years of his life to the Mount and to the pilgrims who visited this place day after day. We are talking about a man who truly lived the Benedictine vow of stability.” These words were spoken at the funeral homily of Fr Odo and summed up the life of our dearly beloved Fr Odo van der Heijdt.

Arnoldus Gerardus Theodorus Maria van der Heijdt was born on 28 September 1930 in Holland to Johannes and Johanna van der Heijdt. He belonged to a family of seven boys and two girls. In February 1954 at the age of 23 years he made the long journey to a distant land in the Caribbean to answer a call to be a monk. He would have been the third generation of his family to answer the call to be a monk. At Mount St Benedict he was given the monastic name, ODO, in honour of one of the great abbots of Cluny. On completion of his novitiate at the Mount, he made his monastic profession on 05 June 1955. After his Solemn Profession in 1958, Br Odo was sent to Rome where he studied for 5 years at the Benedictine Institute of Sant’ Anselmo and was awarded the Doctorate in Theology. One of the highlights of his time in Rome was his Ordination to the Diaconate, which took place at the cave of Subiaco, where St Benedict lived for 3 years as a hermit. He was ordained to the priesthood on 09 July 1961. On his return to Trinidad, he was

assigned to the Seminary where he taught Theology for several years. Later he taught the sciences at the Abbey School and was very helpful to many of the students in giving them a love of learning.



Family photo in 1951 (arrow identifies Fr Odo)

Fr Odo’s sincere love of the monastery, the monks and the monastic life was the hallmark of his life at the Abbey. In addition to his teaching, he reared chickens, assisted in the kitchen and organized the finances of the abbey. Thanks to his wise insights, the Abbey had been able to manage its finances with prudence and foresight. Of all his works in the monastery, the one he cherished most was that of meeting and praying with the pilgrims in the parlour. He always had a word of encouragement and wisdom for each and often shared a moment of prayer with them. Fr Odo gave priority to the pilgrims who visited the Mount. He was there each day of the week and would not let anything get in the way.



He was appointed as Prior of Mount St Benedict in 2003, and remained in this post until his death on 02 February 2014. He had been anointed the previous evening in the presence of the monks and he was at peace with his God.

## ANIMALS AROUND THE MONASTERY

In a corner, by the gate,  
Ben (edict) and Aloys (ius) and Pace (*Pah-chay*)  
run and jump and bark and growl  
but wear no cowl.

Behind the cluster  
of old buildings,  
Chanticleer, the feathered Prior  
Behind a grille of chicken wire  
presides over the Lay Sisters' choir.

Madame L'Abbesse, Marie Lucy  
(whose name before was simply *pussy*)  
now has four novices in tow  
(Their names I'm sure you'd like to know :)  
Magnificat  
Benedicat  
Praedicat (Hullo! An O.P.? Not she!)  
And then comes  
Requiescat!

What would happen-  
Can anyone guess?  
When Requiescat meets Pace!

Grunt! Now isn't it funny how  
No name is given  
To the monastic sow...  
Oink? Steups!  
Pork and Ham, man,  
Pork and Ham for Christmas!



PJ

## A REFLECTION OF THE TRINITY

If the Lord reigns over the earth, then surely He  
resides in the holy land of Trinidad.

I have not visited, nor can I imagine, anywhere  
else in the world where His presence is so  
thoroughly well known.

Shedding its light on the plains below is the gently  
luminous city of Mount Saint Benedict, to which  
pilgrims come from all over Trinidad, the  
Caribbean, America and the world.

They come to find rest from the heavy burden of  
their labours and cares. They weep and tremble as  
the feeble spirits afflicting them flee from one  
glance of the countenance of the Lord, from the  
implacable and imperturbable constancy of His  
Love. They sigh with relief and joy as here, in the  
joyful company of angels and saints, their  
anxieties vanish, and God's loving gift of life  
within them is renewed.

Christians, Muslims and Hindus come, all assured  
of welcome, knowing that they are invited by the  
Lord. All come, seeking Christ by name, for they  
know that God is one, and that the faith of this  
monastery is not a faith in faith, but a faith in the  
living God. Indeed it has always been the case that  
monks live, not just to propagate previous  
formulae, but to hear the Spirit speak in ways that  
are ever new. All of generous Trinidad resonates  
and resounds to this redeeming word of love. Here  
Christ is known not just as the God of the  
Christians, but as the Eternal Word, Lord of the  
Cosmos, whose gentle Spirit always speaks  
beautifully, and where it will. For Christ is unique,  
not by exclusivity but by His universality, and His  
boundless creativity, like sunshine through a  
prism, speaks enchantingly and playfully through  
every religion and soul.

*Anthony Keane OSB  
Monk of Glenstal Abbey, Ireland.*

*(Anthony Keane spent a month and a half in  
October and November 2014 assisting our  
monastery in its pastoral ministry)*

**PAX YOGURT:**  
**A MONASTIC ENTERPRISE**

Ever since Pax Yogurt came into existence the company has received raves about its products by everyone both young and old alike. Pax Yogurt products are healthy and tasty. The Natural yogurt can be used by those who are looking at their sugar intake as well as it can be used for minor stomach ailments. We also carry a range of diabetic yogurt as well as drinks in many different flavours. Our yogurts are used for cooking your curries, stews, or baking fish, chicken, turkey or other meats of your choice. We also tell our customers they may add any fresh fruit of choice and honey to the yogurt giving it an entirely different flavour. Our products can be bought at all major supermarkets as well as at the Pax Abbey Shop at Mount St. Benedict.

The emphasis on a healthy lifestyle with proper eating habits is being served by the monks of the abbey in offering this health product to the public.

**THE PAX ABBEY SHOP**  
**(RELIGIOUS GIFT SHOP & CAFETERIA)**  
**Phone: 662-8792**

The Shop offers a wide assortment of Religious Books for children and adults, Bibles, Rosaries, Statues, Candles, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation tokens and many other items to allow you to grow in that PEACE which the Mount offers. And for our pilgrims in need of light refreshment, the Cafeteria provides our special brand of "PAX" yogurt and the best HONEY you can find. We also have tasty pies/pastries, local sweets (sugar cake, toolum, etc.) and lots more for your enjoyment.

***Come to the Mount!***  
**Experience the Peace. Nourish your mind,  
soul and body.**

One major purpose of our Gift Shop is to assist the abbey with the maintenance of its physical and pastoral needs.

**THANKS!**

The monks of the abbey are very grateful for the assistance which they have received over the year from priests and religious who assisted in its pastoral outreach. Glenstal Abbey sent two of its monks: Fr Andrew Nugent, who has been coming for several years now for two months at a time, and Fr Anthony Keane, whose article "A Reflection Of the Trinity" in this edition sums up his experience. Archbishop Emeritus Donald James Reece from Jamaica and Fr Anthony Aarons, TOR, based in Florida, also made very positive contributions to our ministry. We appreciated very much as well the presence of Fr Mark Dumont from Westminster Abbey in Canada who spent time in our Parlour ministry. Msgr. Patrick Anthony from St Lucia spent part of his Sabbatical at the abbey and was so much an integral part of our life, that we tended to forget that he was a Diocesan Priest. We cannot forget the very positive relationship we enjoy with the local diocesan clergy, under the direction of Fr Clyde Harvey, Vicar for Priests, who at various times came to our aid. Also, we welcomed two young men, recent graduates from St John's Abbey, Minnesota, USA, Drake and Alex, who spent a few months working and living with us.

These visits to our monastery have also given us a broader perspective on our role here at Mount St Benedict. Each of our visitors brought a freshness that helped us appreciate more what we sometimes take for granted. THANKS!

**THE MONASTICE LIFE**

Mount St Benedict offers a way of life that is different. Its emphasis on the centrality of prayer, silence and contemplation addresses values that many young people are yearning for today. In a society crowded by noise and distractions, the Mount offers an opportunity for young people to re-focus on the essentials. Ever considered a vocation to the monastic way of life? Why not contact us for more information?



Abbot John and Prior Paschal at the General Chapter  
**GENERAL CHAPTER IN ISRAEL**

To find ourselves situated in the midst of a land of so much promise, so much conflict and so central to our salvation history was indeed an awesome experience for all the participants of the General Chapter of our Benedictine Congregation of the Annunciation. One word which kept coming to the fore throughout the entire deliberations of the Chapter was the word “presence”. It indicated a deep-seated need for us Benedictines to be actively present to the place in which we find ourselves- a true and tangible understanding of our vow of stability. To be present in the land of Israel and to remain committed there was seen as the essential witness of our fellow Benedictine brothers and sisters who shared their stories, their gifts and their hospitality so wonderfully with all of us.

From 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, approximately fifty (50) representatives from the various Benedictine communities of our Congregation assembled at Pilgerhaus, TABGHA, for the occasion. There we had the opportunity to listen to the stories of each other as we shared our own challenges as monks and nuns in our various contexts.

In his report to the General Chapter entitled “From Assisi to Tabgha”, Abbot President Ansgar regarded our presence as “an encouraging sign of solidarity for the three communities of our Congregation in this land – Dormitio, Tabgha and

Bethlehem”. These communities often live under hostilities that are not easily understood by most.

Meeting in the land that is often called “the fifth Gospel” also gave us the opportunity to listen to the Jewish and Orthodox perspectives and moreover to give us a deeper insight into what it means to witness to the Gospel in the land where Jesus walked.



Praying at the Sea of Galilee

The Chapter helped to bond more closely our various monasteries and to do so in the context of praying where Jesus prayed (on the shore of the Sea of Galilee), walking in Capernaum and Nazareth, where he lived and healed, and standing where he preached on the Mount of the Beatitudes. It is our hope that the Peace which we seek during this time of the year and at all times, a peace which has become so elusive and not only to those who live in the Holy Land, may truly find its way into our world, our communities and our hearts.



On the streets of Nazareth

## SILVER JUBILEE IN GHANA

For several years now, since 2007, Mt. St. Benedict has had a connection with the Monastery of Kristo Buase (*Christ among the Rocks*) in the village of Tanoboase, outside Techiman in Ghana, West Africa. Bro. Paschal Jordan has taught liturgical music to the Community there and composed music for their celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

In October 2012, Fr. Ambrose Flavell, the Prior of Kristo Buase joined us for our Centenary Celebrations here at Mt. St. Benedict; and in August this year, Bro. Paschal joined them for their Silver Jubilee of Foundation.

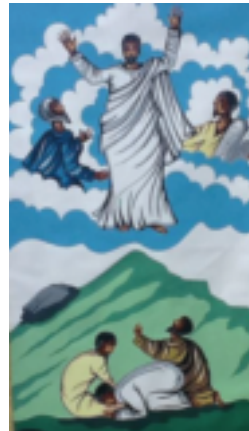


The jubilee celebrations began with a cultural display on 05 August by the children of the nearby St. Martin's Primary School founded by Monks. The next day, on 06 August, the Jubilee Mass of the Transfiguration was celebrated in the open field outside the Monastery gates, with about 1000 persons present. These including the Local Chief, the Sub-Chief, the Queen Mother and retainers, all dressed in *kente* cloth accompanied by large, circular brocaded umbrellas, drums and horns. Present at Mass were the bishop of Techiman (the Diocese in which the monastery is situated), 4 mitred abbots, 10 other monastic guests, scores of priests and religious and a very large gathering of the faithful. The language of the Mass was in English, with the first reading read in both English and *Twi*. Bro. Paschal read the first reading and sang the responsorial psalm.

At the end of Mass there was a fund raising event for the building of the monastic church; this was led by a diocesan priest who, together with his sibling, also a priest, had received financial help from the monastery for his secondary education. Everybody was fed after the Mass.

Monastic visitors were present from the Founding Abbeys of Prinknash, Pluscarden and Chillworth in Great Britain, as well as from West African Benedictine Houses nearby: Koubri in Burkina Faso, Dzogbegan in Togo, Hekanme in Benin and Ewu in Nigeria. Furthest away was Mt. St. Benedict in Trinidad & Tobago.

Well-known T&T Carnival costume designer, Follette Eustace prepared a banner of the Transfiguration, which was sent as a gift to Kristo Buase by the Mt. St. Benedict Community. This was very much appreciated and hung from the ambo at the Jubilee Mass.



There was, however, a note of great sadness in the midst of the Jubilee celebrations. One of the KB Monks, Fr. Bartholomew Banzie, who had been among the first Ghanaians to join the newly-established monastery in 1989, died twelve days after the celebrations. He had been hospitalised for a long time with heart trouble, and had been given a temporary discharge on the Jubilee Day, so that he could attend the Jubilee Mass. This was to be the last time he was among his Brethren at the Monastery. May he receive the reward of all the Saints!

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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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