

Dear confreres and friends of Inkamana Abbey,

Our Monastic Community: Father Prior John Paul undertook a trip to Namibia by car on 17 January to visit our two confreres in our house in Waldfrieden. Waldfrieden, 250 km northeast of Windhoek, is one of the mission stations founded by the German Oblate priests. We Missionary Benedictines of Inkamana took over this station in 1998. For us a house in Namibia is of special significance because Inkamana receives vocations from this country from time to time. After discussions with Father Maximilian Jacobs (49) and Br. Gabriel Thompson (49), Fr. Prior drove back to Inkamana again on 1 February. The 2500 km stretch from Inkamana to Waldfrieden can easily be done by car in two days. On 18 April Fr. Prior traveled once again by car to Namibia. On this occasion, he visited Archbishop Liborius Nashenda, OMI, of Windhoek and spoke with him about the future of our daughter house Waldfrieden. On 3 May, after 15 days, he returned safely to Inkamana. In mid-May, Fr. Maximilian Jacobs flew from Windhoek to Durban to make a report to the community in Inkamana about the development of Waldfrieden. Afterwards he took part in a workshop in Durban organized by Married Couples for Christ.

Brother Isidor Mabaso (35) has been in the classroom again since January of this year. His goal is to finish high school. After several unsuccessful attempts, he is trying this time at a high school near Pongola, 150 km from Inkamana. He lives there with a family for rent and attends classes every day. Br. Bonaventura Johannes (34), who was to make solemn profession shortly, suddenly left our community. He had completed his studies at the government agricultural school and was to be the director of our monastery farm. After nine years of monastic and vocational training in the monastery, he became convinced he had no vocation for monastic life and the missionary apostolate. We wish him God's blessing in his search for a new place in life in his homeland of Namibia.

On 3 March, Fr. Godfrey Sieber flew to Windhoek to take over the pastoral care of the Tutzing Missionary Benedictine Sisters in their priory. Since his three-month work visa ended at the beginning of June, he was advised by the Namibian Ministry of the Interior to return to South Africa in order to get a multi-year work permit. The petition has been prepared but it will probably take several months until it is processed. In the meantime, Fr. Godfrey is again living in his monastic cell at Inkamana Abbey, but helps out temporarily at the Benedictine Sisters of St. Alban in the Elukwatini priory. Their monastery is some 250 km north of Inkamana. Abbot Emeritus Justin Dzikowicz, who spent a long time in America for health issues, has in the meantime returned again to Windhoek and devotes himself to looking after the pastoral needs of the sisters in the Tutzing priory. He will return to America at the beginning of September to celebrate his golden jubilee of profession.

After a long stay at his home monastery of Kumily in India, Father Dominic Onasseril returned to Inkamana in April. In the meantime, he has received the long-awaited work permit from the South African government. He is now teaching religion again in the Inkamana High School and involved in pastoral work. In March, Father Pacificus Mwale (51) spent his annual holiday at Inkamana. Fr. Pacificus is a monk of Inkamana Abbey but at the moment is helping out in the monastery of Katibunga, Zambia. Father Gérard Lagleder took part in a three-day conference of the Knights of Malta Aid Agency in mid-March. On 18 April, he flew to Germany to collect funds for the Blessed Gérard Hospice in Mandeni, Zululand. Fr. Leo Eireiner flew to Germany on 1 June to celebrate his golden jubilee as a missionary and his 80th birthday in his home monastery of Schweiklberg. Fr. Leo came to Zululand in 1967 together with Fr. Vianney Strehl of St. Ottilien (left in 1974) and Br. Magnus Rau of Schweiklberg (ordained a priest in 1982; prior of Tigoni, Kenya, 1992–1997, died in a fatal accident in Nairobi 1997).

Brother Ansfried Machatsch (82), who managed the farm at Inkamana for years, left his residence on the farm after 36 years and moved into a spacious room in the monastery buildings. The difficulties of old age forced him to make this change. Father Pius Paul (80) exchanged his monastery cell in Inkamana for four weeks for the parish house at Maria Ratschitz Mission while Fr. Thomas Tshabalala OFM traveled to Israel to visit his former work places in the Holy Land. He comes back from Israel in mid-June and Fr. Pius ends his service at Maria Ratschitz.

Workshop for the Strengthening of the Community Spirit: The 35 monks of Inkamana Abbey come from seven different countries with varying cultures and traditions. In order to strengthen the community spirit, a three-day workshop was scheduled for mid-March. Two experts in social work, Dr. Theresa Sacco and Sister Tshifhiwa Munzhedzi, led the workshop. To encourage the members of a community in a deeper understanding of one another and to be more open in dealing with each other, the two experts explained the basic prerequisites for a well-functioning community life. For this, exercises designed by professionals were to help the monks to apply what they learned. For many participants of the workshop, this was no small change. At the end, everyone was confident that the three days of work would bear fruit.

Beatification of Sister Reinolda May OSB? Ngome in Zululand is perhaps the most visited Marian pilgrimage shrine in southern Africa. Its existence goes back to the initiative of Sr. Reinolda Mai. Sr. Reinolda (1901–1981), a Tutzing Missionary Benedictine Sister came to Zululand as a new missionary in 1925 and for years directed the delivery ward of the mission hospital in Nongoma, Zululand. She not only made a name for herself in Zululand as a midwife, but also as an extremely zealous missionary. She frequently accompanied the priests of Nongoma on Sundays when they went to the outstations. She visited the sick and elderly and maintained contact with mothers who had been released from hospital. Her name became known beyond the borders of Zululand and even over South Africa when, after her death, the news spread that between 1954 and 1971 she allegedly had a total of ten Marian appearances. She herself made notes about it. During one of these apparitions, the Mother of God apparently expressed the wish “to be venerated as the Tabernacle of the Most High at a place in Zululand where seven springs originate.” This place was identified, with the help of Sr. Reinolda, as an outstation of Nongoma named Ngome. The place is some 20 km west of the mission station of Nongoma and at the edge of a thick forest. Several springs were actually discovered some hundred meters from this place. The bishop responsible, Aurelian Bilgeri OSB (1909–1973), who led the diocese of Eshowe from 1947 till his death, was rather skeptical about the whole story but on the basis of the urgent entreaties of Sr. Reinolda permitted a small chapel of hardly more than 4 square meters to be built in Ngome in 1966. Only in 1984 did Bishop Mansuet Biyase (1933–2005), the successor to Bishop Bilgeri, allow the construction of a larger chapel. It was erected on a rocky plateau and contained a painting done by an artist of the “Mother of God, Tabernacle of the Most High”. The number of pilgrims who came to Ngome either privately or with an organized pilgrimage quickly rose. To take this development into account, Father Michael Mayer OSB, the custodian of the shrine, had a second, larger church erected in 2002. When Fr. Michael returned to Germany in 2009, Bishop Thaddeus Xolelo Kumalo of Eshowe handed over the direction of the shrine to the priests of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).

On 1 May 2017, Bishop Thaddeus Kumalo commissioned Father Dennis Xulu, a diocesan priest of Eshowe, Fr. Wayne Weldschidt OMI, the director of the Ngome shrine, as well as Fr. André Bohas MSC of the Diocese of Tzaneen to collect material about the life and work of Sr. Reinolda. For this step, the bishop had previously obtained the necessary *placet* from Rome hoping that after some time the beatification process would begin. Father André Bohas MSC came to Inkamana on 3 May along with Bishop Hugh Patrick Slattery MSC, the former bishop of Tzaneen (1984–2010). The two Sacred Heart Missionaries inquired about the life of Sr. Reinolda and visited her grave in the Inkamana cemetery which has already been visited by pilgrims to Ngome for years. Fr. André was the promotor of the beatification process of Benedict Daswa, a former catechist of the Diocese of Tzaneen. Daswa suffered a martyr’s death on 2 February 1990 in his home village in South Africa. He was pronounced blessed on 13 September 2015.

In the last letter there was talk of the great drought that afflicted Zululand. We were forced to drill for water on our property. Of the three wells, only the third brought a little success. The country has now recovered somewhat due to the abundant summer rains. The dam that surrounds Inkamana to the north and west is nearly 70% full again. In order to ensure a water supply for Inkamana in the long term, we are still looking for a permanent solution.

With best wishes for all readers of this newsletter from Inkamana,

Fr. Godfrey Sieber OSB