



A letter from Zululand

Introduction

Dear Confreres, Friends, and Benefactors,

Winter is having its toll here in South Africa. Monks of our Abbey have dusted and begun wearing their monastic cowls for winter, cucular. Between June and July, the temperatures have been extremely low due to the snowfall in and around the Drakensberg Mountain. Amidst the cold weather, our monastic life has to go on. Thus, dear friends of God, this third edition of our newsletter is comprised of activities of the months of June and July as follows:

Inkamana a Spiritual Center for Spiritual Nourishment in Southern Africa

Inkamana is increasingly becoming a spiritual center for spiritual nourishment for people of Southern African countries especially: Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. During the months of June and July, Inkamana has recorded more than 10,000 pilgrims. Efforts are being made by our procurator Br Bernard to increase our facilities such as an ablution block to accommodate many pilgrims at once. In South Africa, Inkamana Benedictine Abbey is well known as a pilgrimage stopover while on the way to and from Ngome Marian Shrine. It is also a place for spiritual nourishment because of the grave of Sr Reinolda May OSB, the Ngome Marian visionary, and the statue of Jesus lying in the tomb which is in the side chapel of the Abbey church. The Abbey is also well known in Southern African countries because of its monastic silence. Many people are more and more coming to the Abbey for retreats and workshops. During the months of June and July, our Abbey has witnessed a huge presence of six ecclesiastical provinces of Southern Africa, namely: archdiocese of Maseru, archdiocese of Bloemfontein, archdiocese of Cape Town, archdiocese of Durban, archdiocese of Johannesburg and archdiocese of Pretoria.

We had brief interviews with a good number of pilgrims and retreatants. Mrs Thembisa Jikwa who comes twice a year to Inkamana and she is the coordinatator of pilgrims of Marianhill diocese, Bethlehem diocese and Archdiocese of Durban said that, her spiritual life is nourished when she visits Inkamana and she gets spiritual fulfilment when she prays with monks during solemn vespers and lauds. That is why she constantly spend the whole weekend at Inkamana with her group of prilgrims. Mrs Cecelia Sibisi, the alumni of Inkamana High school, from Archdiocese of Durban said Inkamana is a center of prayer for her life. If a year passes by without visiting the Abbey, she feels empty and spiritually down. She feels spiritually up-lifted when she participates at prayers with the monks. Fr Brendan of Archdiocese of Cape Town narrated that, every time he visits Inkamana Abbey, he gets spiritual energy and nourishment. He values the monastic silence. Mrs Maretsepile from Lesotho said, she will never stop coming to Inkamana Abbey because she feels Jesus presence at Inkamana. A student from Bloemfontein, Marang Rickert, said that, the experience and spiritual wonders she has encountered while at Inkamana will never disappear in her memory. Every year she will be coming to overnight at Inkamana. Surely, no pilgrim can visit Inkamana without encountering and appreciating the presence of our humble porter Br Johannes who avails himself to pray with the pilgrims, giving them spiritual in-put and then guiding them to Sr Renoilda's tomb.

Inkamana Events and Activities

“...then are they truly monks when they live by the labor of their hands”, Inkamana farm has made a tremendous progress in its operations in the recent months. The farm has now acquired a milking machine and the livestock have increased steadily. Under the direction of our Br Sub-prior Kevin, assisted by Br Polycarp, Inkamana farm can now supply beef,

pork, milk and eggs to both the Abbey kitchen and student's kitchen. We thank the procurators of Munsterschwazach and Sankt Ottilien for generously financing the purchase of the milking machine, chicken feather plucking machine, cattle, pigs and poultry. With this development, Inkamana is slowly getting to sustain itself economically.

Inkamana Abbey hosted a five-day course in Basic Counselling Skills for Catholic Teachers of Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal. Ms Swazi Zikode who works for the Catholic Education Institute and has an office at Inkamana, coordinated the whole training under the theme "Keeping God's Children safe". This follows the policy of Catholic School Board on Education under Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) on Child Safeguarding Policy in Catholic schools. The participants came from five Catholic dioceses: Archdiocese of Durban, Eshowe Diocese, Ingwavuma Vicariate, Umzimkulu Diocese, and Dundee Diocese. The main focus of the five-day course training was to enhance educators' abilities to provide face-to-face counselling assistance to the "wounded and broken children" within the catholic schools set-up. We are honoured to be hosting Catholic schools seminars and workshops. In May, Inkamana also hosted the Policy Seminar for Catholic Schools, in which the School Chaplain, Fr Dominic and the School Principal Mrs Isabel Steenkamp attended. We are very grateful to Ms Swazi Zikode for her zeal and dedication in empowering catholic teachers with necessary skills and tools in helping children with social issues.

Eight of our Inkamana High School students were once again invited to Germany for the circus from 11 July to 21 July. They were accompanied by their history teacher Mrs Retha Röhrs and her husband. We sincerely thank St Ottilien Archabbey for all financial support and the families that hosted our students. The High School had an honour in the month of July to receive Miss Samkelisiwe Mdlala from University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in Durban. After noticing the high record of education excellence of Inkamana High School, she came to do her assessment and practicals in teaching. A local foundation based in Durban called ILAF (Ikusasa Le Afrika Foundation), has selected and generously donated to Inkamana High School to renovate and improve some of the school blocks, school toilets, the hostel, and the school grounds to modern standards. Work is already in progress. We are very grateful to ILAF for their interest in the kind of education and ethos that Inkamana upholds.

The monks were psychologically energized and challenged by a workshop conducted by a psychologist, Fr David Mocheka Sehlabaka, on 12 June. The theme of the workshop was "Personality Disorder". It was both a spiritual and psychological presentation as it was rooted on Luke 15: 11-40 (The prodigal son/lost son/merciful father). The monks were challenged to examine their personalities and ask themselves what is normal and abnormal in their lives? Fr David gave the monks four cardinal questions about personality. These were the questions: 1. what sort of personality are you? 2. What distinctive features of personality do you have that your brother does not have? 3. How much do you know yourself? And 4. Do others know you as you know yourself? It was a presentation based on community development personality, which embraces acceptance of other people's personality in the monastery. Monks were challenged to do psychological assessment for personality disorder in order to understand each other as a Benedictine monastic family. After the workshop, Fr Prior Ambrose Mshengu sincerely thanked Fr David for an informative and touching presentation. He further narrated that, he himself has been transformed and urged all the monks to be transformed and put in practise and have a new approach to monastic family life; but, monks should not judge each other. There is a need to embrace each others' personality for the common good of our monastic life.

On 2 June, Br Vincent Ngwane made his final commitment in our Abbey church as he professed his perpetual vows. In his homily, Abbot John Paul Mwaniki appreciated the gifts and talents of Br Vincent and asked him to share his talents with the community. He advised the community to share all things in common and live according to the rule of our Holy Father Benedict. Br Vincent is a trained chef from Majuba ITB college in Newcastle, South Africa. He hails from Mangethe Parish of Eshowe Diocese, South Africa. He did his primary and secondary level of education in Zululand. On the same day, during vespers, Br Damian Mkwanzazi renewed his vows for a period of one year. The community is grateful for the gift of the two brothers in our Abbey.

16 June is a Youth Day and a public holiday in South Africa. Youth Day, as it is popularly known, is a day in which South Africans honour the youth which were ambushed by the apartheid regime police in Soweto on 16 June 1976. On this day over 500 youths were killed. Although the protests of 16 June 1976 resulted in a number of casualties, the youth of 1976 played an important role in fighting and overcoming the inequality and oppression caused by apartheid. Every year on this day there are "Youth Day" celebrations which are held country wide in order to empower individuals of all

ethnicities in South Africa and to remember those who lost their lives. In Zululand, Youth Day is well known as “*Usuku Lwabantu Abasha*”. Our Diocese of Eshowe celebrated its youth day with us at the Abbey. Some young monks joined the youth and interacted with the diocesan chaplain, Fr Sibusiso and the chairperson of the diocesan youth, Ms Nontobeko Mkwanyana. The youth were very delighted to celebrate their Youth Day here. Fr Sibusiso encouraged the youth of Eshowe Diocese to embrace Christian values and make healthy friendships among themselves.

Every last Sunday of the month, monks of Inkamana celebrate the feast days and birthdays of the confreres. It was on 27 June and 29 July, that all monks gathered in the recreation room and shared cakes and drinks as a family.

We had a conventual Mass in the Abbey Church on 11 July, where we celebrated the solemnity of our Holy Father Benedict. On the same day, Br Emmanuel Suntheni and Br Francis Kuutondokwa renewed their vows for 2 more years. Both of them are studying theology in Kenya. A good number of consecrated men and women, seminarians and friends of Inkamana came and joined the monks for the feast. As Benedict often talks of two tables in the monastery: the table in the Church which is the altar (sharing spiritual food: Christ’s body) and the table in the refectory (sharing physical food), all visitors were invited to join the monks in the refectory and they appreciated the hospitality.

Travellings and Visitors

On 4 June, Br Leonard Dlamini left for 6 months to Germany. He is residing at Jakobsberg Monastery – a dependent house of St Ottilien ArchAbbey – in Ockenheim, Rheinland . He is in Germany to finish writing his Masters Degree thesis in Political Philosophy under the research question “*Reconciling Multiculturalism and Feminism: An African Perspective*” . He is a student at Stellenbosh University near Cape town in the Western Cape Province - South Africa. We wish him well during his stay in Germany. Mr Karel Foster from Cape town visited Inkamana for a month. He came as a candidate. He has shown interest to join us. He is a trained chef and pianist, and has worked for almost 15 years. On 8 June, the abbey cellarer Fr Boniface Kamushishi took Fr Antony Mutale (a monk from Katibunga Monastery – Zambia) to Scottsburgh, Kwa-Zulu Natal. Fr Antony is in South Africa for medical treatment. Currently, Fr Antony is at an awareness centre called The-cedars an inside recovery centre. The Abbey is in close contact with the management of The-cedars centre. We are told that Fr Antony is getting better each day and the management is very pleased with his progress as is able to intergrate with resident doctors and is participating very well in group discussions. He will remain there for three months and the community is looking forward to welcoming him back at the beginning of September. Br Adrian Bisika left for a well deserved holiday in Malawi on 10 July. He will leave for Langata, Kenya, on 3 August with Br Francis Kuutondokwa to continue with their theological studies. Br Vincent Ngwane left on 13 June to Mangethe for a three weeks yearly holiday. Fr Leo left for Germany on 25 July for his two months holiday. From 12 to 21 July, Fr Rafael Chonde directed an annual retreat to Benedictine sisters of St Alban in Elukwatini, Witbank diocese. Br Emmanuel conducted a 3 day retreat with confirmands at Maria Ratschitz retreat house from 27 to 30 July.

Abbot John-Paul left for Kenya on 12 July for thanksgiving Mass at home. The same day, Abbot Emeritus Dennis departed for Tanzania to process his work permit. On Sunday, 15 July, Fr Abbot John-Paul celebrated family mass at St Benedict parish in Ruaraka where he worked as the parish priest for three years. The developments which he initiated still stands today and are bearing fruits. There was much joy and ululation as the praishoners saw their former parish priest with a mitre. On Saturday, 21 July, he celebrated a thanksgiving Mass with his extended family in Kitale-Kenya. He was welcomed traditionally with local traditional dances. As part of our missionary service, Fr Dominic has been in Pietermaritzburg for a good number of Sundays to celebrate Syro-marabar Mass. He celebrates Eastern rite Mass for the Indian community from Kerala and elsewhere in India who are currently working within the Archdiocese of Durban. He got a dispensation to be celebrating Syro-Marabar Mass from Cardinal Napier, the Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Durban. At the invitation of Fr Victor Henry Chavunga, the administrator of St Benedict cathedral of Eshowe diocese, Br Isidore Mabaso and Br Emmanuel Suntheni went to Eshowe on 15 July to give a presentation on Benedictine Spirituality and Inkamana Abbey. The parishoners were very happy and thanked Fr Victor for inviting the brothers as it was their first time to have a Benedictine family day for all the parishoners. On 30 July, Inkamana High School in conjunction with Northern KZN Youth Choir, hosted a concert in the Abbey church. It was well attended by people from around Vryheid area as well as students from other schools.

With greetings and blessings from Inkamana Abbey community: Your Scribe, Br Emmanuel Suntheni OSB.