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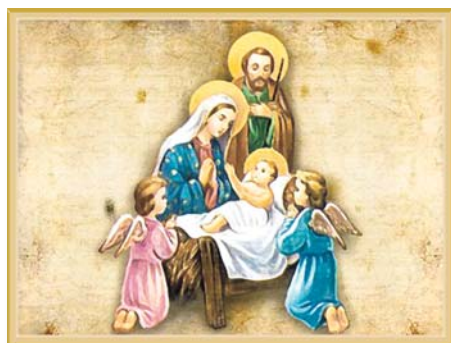
## Mount St Benedict Newsletter

Christmas 2009



An aerial view of Mount St Benedict

*The Abbot and monks are very grateful for the wonderful support that you have given the Abbey over the past year. You are being constantly remembered in our prayers.*



Mount St Benedict  
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During the season of Christmas, we celebrate how Earth welcomes Jesus in a marriage of Divinity and Materiality. We celebrate that moment when the Earth was touched by the Divine in a way that would make it sacred in every sense of the word. We celebrate both the visitation of God and the hospitality of Earth which received Emmanuel "God is with us." When St Benedict tells us in his Rule that we must treat the tools of the garden as if they were the very vessels on the altar, he was drawing from this message of the Incarnation, which allows us to view the entire earth and all that it contains with a deep respect, knowing that the God we believe in, is a God who is bigger than the Church, a God who transcends race, religion, geography and culture. We believe in a God who is manifested in every facet of human and earthly existence. Over the past year at Mount St Benedict, we have tried to open our hearts to the many ways in which God continues to reveal Himself to us. It has not been easy. We are tempted to abandon this project when we see the distress that is the lot of many of the pilgrims who make the trek to the Mount on a regular basis. They are overcome by the sad sceptre of crime that hovers over our people. Many live in fear. But we do not give up hope. Our Benedictine vow of Stability challenges us to find God precisely in the place where we move, live and work. And if we do not find God where we are we may never find God at all. We thank you most sincerely for the kindnesses that you have shown to our monastic community over the years. As we celebrate this special time of the coming of the Christ child, we pray for the grace of hospitality so that we may receive Him in our midst as God continues to be born over and over again among us.

Abbot and Community

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARIES

Our reigning Patriarch, Bro Joseph Perez, known in more recent times for his Parlour Ministry to the pilgrims, will celebrate his sixtieth anniversary of Monastic Profession on 04 February 2010. He is well loved both within the community and by the many pilgrims with whom he has met and prayed. As a former principal of St Bede Vocational School he had endeared himself to hundreds of students who now look for him with joy and pride as they speak of their several accomplishments. He has also set a record as the longest serving Sub-Prior at the Abbey. He will attain the grand old age of eighty-five years on 16 June 2010 and is looking forward to celebrating with his monastic community and his family from Matura.

Our hard-working Prior Fr Odo van der Heijdt will be 55 year professed on 05 June 2010. He will become our newest octogenarian on 28 September 2010 as he looks forward to his eightieth birthday. We wish him many years of faithful service in the Lord's vineyard.

Bro Tony Badri, known for his dedication to the Maintenance and Liturgical aspects of the Abbey, celebrates his tenth anniversary of Monastic Oblation on 15 August 2010. We wish him continued grace in his monastic commitment.

Abbot John Pereira turns 55 years of age on 12 July 2010. He asks for continued prayer to be faithful to his ministry of service.

Our monastery sends special greetings to our former Abbot, Bishop Francis Alleyne of the Diocese of Georgetown. He will be twenty-five years ordained to the priesthood on 07 July 2010. May God continue to bless him!

### FR BENEDICT JOINS THE STARS!

2009 began with the sad news of the passing away of Fr Benedict Simons, OSB, on Thursday 01 January at the age of 89 years. Cornelius Benedictus Maria Simons was born in The Hague

in Holland on 18 June 1919 and joined the Abbey of Mount St Benedict on 08 December 1947, where he was given the name "Benedict". He was professed as a monk on 21 March 1949 and ordained to the Priesthood on 28 October 1952. Fr Benedict was one of the most loved and sought after monks at the Abbey and always radiated a spirit of joy. He is greatly missed by the monks and by the many pilgrims who sought him out as a ready confessor, confidant, adviser and friend. The funeral of Fr Benedict took place at the Abbey Church at 10:00 am on Saturday 03 January 2009. He was a great lover of people and stars. He taught for several years at the Abbey School and was co-founder of the Trinidad and Tobago Astronomical Society. He loved photography and thousands of his photographs are housed in the Abbey. May God grant him the fullness of joy that he often radiated while here on earth.



Fr Benedict looking through his telescope

### NEW LIFE AT THE ABBEY

A young man from Guayaguayare joined the Abbey on 01 October 2009. As a postulant, Richard Jones is pursuing classes in the Rule of St Benedict and Monastic Spirituality. He looks forward to his Novitiate which will begin in 2010. We wish him God's guidance and perseverance.

### ABBOT CELESTINE AT THE MOUNT

'As I said at the farewell lunch, there is a warmth of welcome on the Mount – not only for hundreds of pilgrims, but also for fellow monks, who are rapidly and fraternally integrated into your community... the pastoral experience was precious and rewarding. Whether I can savour it again remains to be seen. Meanwhile, I am quoting Churchill here when I speak of my stay with you: "Never have so few done so much for so many in the counselling area." Long may it be so!'

These gracious words of Abbot Celestine Cullen at the end of his five month stay at the Mount continue to inspire our brethren as we seek to rise to the pastoral demands of the growing numbers of pilgrims. To meet these demands, Abbot John had asked Abbot Patrick Hederman of Glenstal Abbey in Ireland for help. He did so by sending to us a wonderful and very experienced monk: a former Abbot of Glenstal Abbey and a former Abbot President of our Congregation. He assisted us from March to July 2009 and our community was edified by the manner in which Abbot Celestine was able to adapt to our Caribbean ethos and to assist us in so many ways. Thank you Abbot Patrick! Thank you Abbot Celestine! May God bless you and your community for this show of solidarity within our Benedictine family!



Abbot Celestine Cullen, OSB, at the Mount

### FARM HOUSE TO AIDS CENTRE

The old poultry Farm Building: "The Farm House" has been converted to a facility to meet the needs of the person living with HIV/AIDS and his/her family and to provide Respite Care. This is a project of CARITAS AIDS MINISTRY (CAM) which is involved in assisting individual, families/communities affected by HIV/AIDS. After spending over seven years in trying unsuccessfully to obtain a suitable site for the project, CAM approached the Abbey. The monks gave their support and in 2006 formalised an agreement to allow CAM to utilise "The Farm House" for the purpose. The first phase of the renovation of the building was recently completed due to the generosity of a number of donors. There is still much more funding needed. The official opening of CARITAS HOUSE was set for World AIDS Day (01 December 2009). The Abbey is pleased to have this facility associated with the Mount.

### THE PAX ABBEY SHOP

Apart from the counselling facility at the Mount, hundreds of visitors are received each week at the Abbey and often find a first point of reception at The Pax Abbey Shop. It is a dual facility in which the mind and heart of the troubled soul is uplifted by several books of an inspirational nature and several aids to prayer and reflection, such as rosaries, medals, sacred images, statues and devotional material. In addition, it offers the facility to restore the tired and thirsty traveller by offering eats and drinks of a wide variety.

The dedicated and courteous employees are an asset to the Abbey as they augment the already well tested spirit of Benedictine Hospitality, which has become synonymous with the Mount. Among the wide variety of books on offer, there is an assortment of literature on the Spirituality of St Benedict, which has become popular among the laity.



Sis. Jean, Helen and Agnes (See article on page 3)

### **PAX YOGURT**

From Cottage Industry to Local Industry!!! Pax Yogurt started in 1989 as a cottage industry supplying yogurt for the well-being of the monks. The business quickly grew into a local industry in 2003 and a refrigerated vehicle was purchased to enable the supplying of supermarkets and the general public. Fr. Cuthbert van de Sande, who is the 'Kitchen Master' at the Monastery, was the monk responsible for the formation of this enterprise.

For the health-conscious, the benefits of Yogurt is 'Gospel'. Yogurt has been researched and many areas of a person's health can be helped with its use. We make Yogurt Drinks – a healthy, quick booster, especially when one is on the run, as are so many people these days. Also another product is our Yogurt Spread, which includes Garlic and "Shadon Beni" in its composition. This product serves as a dip, a salad dressing or just plain spread on rolls, bread, crackers, etc.

From its humble beginnings in 1989, with just Fr. Cuthbert and a few kitchen staff, the Company now employs a total of fourteen (14) persons, and has a Board of Directors. There are now two refrigerated vehicles and a third vehicle was purchased for short runs. Our customers are all over Trinidad and Tobago.

For further information, please visit the Abbey's website: [www.paxabbey.catholicweb.com](http://www.paxabbey.catholicweb.com)



Fr Christopher with some MFP participants

### **FR CHRISTOPHER REPORTS ON MFP 2009**

The Monastic Formators' Programme (MFP 2009) in which I was privileged to participate in Rome (8 weeks) and Assisi (5 weeks) from 12 March till 12 June has indeed been a wonderful and enriching experience. It was like having a second novitiate (and I dare say an even better and much more comprehensive one than the novitiate I did almost 50 years ago). The MFP 2009 comprised of 28 participants of 18 different countries and about five of us with double nationality. Living for three months in a community of such diversity as regards culture, customs, monastic tradition, mixture of female and male and difference in age added a very special flavour, beauty and value, so much so that not a few were expressing the wish to continue as a new monastic community, which however would frustrate the *raison d'être* of the programme.

Even though at times I found the going rough and challenging as the oldest participant (68), I herewith express my gratitude to all who made it possible for me to attend MFP 2009 and who encouraged me to persevere to the end: the directors (Frs. Brendan Thomas and Mark Butlin) and all who assisted them (facilitators and lecturers), my sisters and brothers co-participants, my own community for making the financial sacrifices, and of course our Heavenly Father.

May the Lord make it possible for many more to follow the MFP's of the future!

### **OBLATES GATHER IN ROME**

Three of our lay oblates attended the second World Congress of Benedictine Oblates held in Rome, Italy from 02 to 10 October 2009. Sister Jean White, National Coordinator and Sisters Helen Rodriguez and Agnes Clarke (see photo on page 6) were among the two hundred and fifty Benedictine Oblates from around the world who converged on the Salesianum Hotel and Conference Centre. The theme of the Congress was "The Religious Challenges of Today – The Benedictine Answer". Abbot Primate Notker Wolf opened the Congress. The Congress was a wonderful opportunity for our representatives to experience the international flavour of the Benedictine Way and also to reflect on its spirituality. The topics presented were: "The Contemplative Oblate Today"; "Mission and Inter-Religious Dialogue"; and "Personal Reflections and Communion". The Oblates had the opportunity to visit three major sites of Benedictine interest: Subiaco, Monte Cassino and Sant' Anselmo. Throughout the meeting, the Abbot Primate emphasized that spirituality is not a private affair, but involves living and praying with others. The delegates returned to Trinidad renewed with the spirit of St Benedict and ready to share what they had learnt at the Congress. A retreat was organised at the Abbey Retreat House from 13 to 15 November 2009 for the delegates to share their newly-acquired wisdom and enthusiasm with their fellow oblates.

### **EAST GERMANY HOSTS CHAPTER**

Abbot John Pereira attended the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Annunciation, which was held at the Priory of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Huysburg, Germany. The meeting took place from Saturday 12 to Thursday 17 September 2009. The previous Chapter was held in Belgium in 2004. These meetings provide an opportunity to build greater fraternal relations between the various monasteries of the Congregation. There were forty-seven participants from the monasteries and the proceedings were chaired by Abbot President Ansgar Schmidt.

There were presentations on the Rule of St Benedict and periods of discussion and reflection. During the Chapter a petition from the Benedictine Nuns of St Lucia, West Indies, to obtain affiliation with our Congregation was considered and accepted. This will strengthen the relations between our monastery in Trinidad and our new-found sisters in St Lucia.



General Chapter Participants 2009

### **MONKS LAUNCH TAXI SERVICE**

The pilgrims are benefitting from a new TAXI service launched at Mount St Benedict on Tuesday 01 September 2009. This service replaced the former Bus Service which proved difficult to manage as the PTSC concession held by the Abbey and which expired on 31 August 2009 had required drivers to have a special license. The TAXI service comprises two Suzuki APV seven-seater Taxis, which were blessed by the Abbot in the presence of the community of monks. The Vehicles have been named after MAURUS and PLACID, the early disciples of St Benedict. MAURUS and PLACID are also the monastic names of the first two Trinidadians to become monks of the monastery of Mount St Benedict. The only requirement for one to drive the Vehicles is that the person be the holder of a TAXI BADGE. The Vehicles are kept on the compound of the Abbey. Fr Abbot obtained his TAXI BADGE in mid September and he has encouraged some employees and monks to do the same.

### GUYANA BENEDICTINES

*“Reflect carefully on how things have gone for you,”* urges the Lord through the Prophet Haggai (Haggai 1:5). As we reflect on the blessings and challenges of the year, we have only gratitude for God’s mercies.

- While the Monastery is not the Parish Church – which is three miles away – the Monks have recognised that we cannot ignore the pastoral needs of those nearest to us. And so it was that, last Christmas, we had the joy of seeing twelve of the youngsters who frequent our Monastery Chapel make their First Holy Communion at the Parish Church in Bartica. These have now begun to prepare for Confirmation. In September they were presented with their Bibles and urged to live by the Word of God.
- After twenty years (1989-2009) of teaching music in Bartica, Bro. Paschal rounded off this ministry, last June, with a two-week workshop in reading music and basic harmony for keyboard and guitar. The workshop was funded by a donor from Trinidad. Because Barticians are so mobile, it has been increasingly difficult to sustain the regular attendance, study and practice so necessary for real progress. Persons who still request his services will henceforth make the trip into the Monastery.
- Connections and Transitions:
  - The Stephens Family of Bartica, and friends of the Mora Camp Monastery, spent several days at the Retreat House of our Mother House at Mount St. Benedict in Trinidad, and brought news of and greetings from the Brethren there.
  - Our four Oblates joined us for the Feast of St. Benedict, celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharist and table fellowship with us. Deep sharing followed the meal.
  - Cecilia Smith, a long time worshipper at our Monastery Chapel went home to God after losing her battle with diabetes.
  - Change has come to the Parish of Bartica with the resignation of Fr. Hildebrand, the Priest-in-charge, because of ill health. The Bishop has appointed Fr. Jaime Lalaguna, (of the Missionary Society of the Philippines) as Parish Priest. We are grateful for Fr. Hildebrand’s contribution to the parish, and we ask God to watch over his health. We ask God’s blessing on Fr. Jaime too, as he takes over not one, but three parishes – Linden, Bartica and Mahdia – at this time of acute shortage of priests. May the vitality he has shown in his previous assignments show itself equally at this new time.
- Tourists have been turning up at our gate armed with a new guidebook to Guyana written by Kirk Smok as part of the Bradt Travel Guides series of guidebooks. It is magnificently positive and laudatory about the Guyana Monastery. There is a description of our little Monastery on the Mazaruni River, stressing its contemplative and tranquil setting – treasure to seekers of the sublime:

*“BENEDICTINE MONASTERY: The monastery is situated on an isolated hillside just a few miles outside of Bartica. The nicely landscaped grounds, complete with lush garden, are surrounded by thick jungle foliage. The multi-storey wooden house overlooks the Mazaruni River and the entire place seems to resonate with calm...  
The grounds and house are peaceful though, and they (the Monks) like to keep it that way.  
Guests are expected to be the type of people who find beauty in silence, be it praying, reading, reflecting or birdwatching...”*

The Monks are seen as a further enhancement of what nature has to offer, as they are described as *‘well-read, well-travelled, and quite fond of passing the time in engrossing conversation’*...

As we *“Reflect carefully on how things have gone,”* we have had to recognise, in spite of the good things recounted above, how frail in fact we are: we are an aging Community, with the health challenges that this stage of life brings. We ask your prayer as we try to discern the way forward.

The Guyana Benedictines wish you a greater experience of God’s presence on 2010, as you travel the road of life. May the prayer of Estelle White (U.K.) in her song, be yours:

*‘Walk with me, O my Lord,  
through the darkest night and brightest day.  
Be at my side, O Lord.  
Hold my hand and guide me on my way.’*

(The Guyana Benedictines can be contacted at [guyanamonks@gmail.com](mailto:guyanamonks@gmail.com) or by phone at 592-689-1664)



Brother Paschal, Abbot Hildebrand and Abbot John at prayer June 2009

### TWO LAUNCHINGS

The Catholic Religious Educational Development Institute (CREDI), an Institute set up by the Roman Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago to cater to the growing need for Tertiary Education among Catholics, launched its Bachelor’s Degree Program in Education (specialization in Catholic Music Education) and its Diploma in Pastoral Ministry (specialization in Caribbean Liturgical Music Studies) on 02 November 2009. Bro Paschal, who prepared the Liturgical Music syllabus for the programme, was given an award in recognition of his contribution to the development of Liturgical Music in the Caribbean. The launching took place at the Auditorium, St Finbar’s R. C. Church, Diego Martin.

Earlier in the year, on Wednesday 01 July 2009, the CD "Listen" was launched in Guyana and on the following day on Thursday 02 July, in Trinidad at the Church of the Assumption Parish Hall in Maraval. The CD consists of songs by Bro Paschal Jordan, OSB, Llewyn Gill, SLMM, and Michael White. As indicated in the accompanying brochure, the CD was presented as "gentle music for listening, reflection and prayer; for attentiveness to the still small voice in our hearts, and for the healing of the spirit." These words of the composers sum up the beautiful CD that was launched. We trust that many will come closer to God through this production.

We thank God for the contribution which Bro Paschal continues to make to Church music in the Caribbean.