



CONFEDERAZIONE BENEDETTINA  
**SANT'ANSELMO**  
Roma

## **Circular Letter of the Abbot Primate**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is my first newsletter to our big Benedictine family. Fraternal greetings to you all!

### **The Congress of Abbots**

A few days ago I was shown a video made during the Congress. It brought back the memories of that gathering of 215 abbots and priors, 23 sisters from the CIB and many others. During those days Sant'Anselmo felt like a bee-hive, busy and filled with excitement. Many older abbots met again after 8 years, and a big number had come for the first time. The Congress was well prepared and a good mood prevailed all the way until the end. Important key note speeches were given by Sr Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, and veteran Dominican Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP (who was named a Cardinal). Abbess Franziska Lukas of Dinklage shared with us the vision of the CIB for the future development of the structures for Benedictine Women. Through a number of reports the abbots were informed about the state of the Collegio and the University which are both doing rather well at this time. And a new abbot primate was elected.

The Congress also made a few decisions: the abbey of Sainte-Marie de la Garde in France, a daughterhouse of Le Barroux, was received into the Confederation as a monastery Extra Congregationes. The Congress also agreed that we should request the Holy See to approve once again a proper calendar for the Benedictine Confederation, and that a liturgy commission for the Confederation should be established. We will also undertake a more detailed study on how to understand and implement the possibility of having brothers as abbots which Pope Francis opened up on 18 May 2022.

Finally, the abbots agreed that the year 2028/29 should be celebrated as a Benedictine jubilee. According to traditional chronology, 529 is the year in which St Benedict founded Montecassino. 2029 offers itself as an opportunity to celebrate 1500 years of Benedictine life. The Congress concluded that this should be prepared and celebrated throughout our Confederation, not just at Montecassino, starting with the Congress of 2028. My hope is that this will become an opportunity for serious reflection on the role of our monasteries in the church and in the world at a time of epochal change. I invite you all to start thinking about this, and also to share ideas and reflections about this with us here at Sant'Anselmo. You will certainly hear about this again.

## War and Peace

The Congress of Abbots was reminded repeatedly of conflict and war. We heard of the experience of monasteries in Ukraine, Burkina Faso and the Holy Land and finally decided to write a message of peace to our communities. During our encounter with Pope Francis on Sept 18, he, too, encouraged us to work on peace and said: "Peace, that is your thing as Benedictines. But start from inside!" meaning, inside our monasteries. Every day we pray "Dona nobis pacem", calling on Christ as the true giver of peace. The peace message of the Congress is added as an attachment to this letter.

## From the Synod (ours)

At the end of the Congress we had a brief Synod of Abbot Presidents. We looked at dates, places and the organisation of the synod itself, and put together some ideas for the implementation of the Congress decisions. We decided to explore the possibility of having a program for young abbots. The Permanent Commission, a kind of standing committee of the synod which serves also as part of the council of the abbot primate, consists now of Abbot President Maksymilian Nawara of the Annuntiation Congregation, Abbot General Anthony Puthenpurackal of the Silvestrines, and Abbot General Giuseppe Casetta of the Vallombrosians. Abbot General Giuseppe was also elected the new vicar of the abbot primate.



## Life at Sant'Anselmo

After the departure of the abbots, the house returned to normal life and on October 8<sup>th</sup> the academic year was opened in a very Roman way, combining solemnity and joyful elegance. Degrees were handed out, and the renovated Aula I was blessed.

In his speech, the rector Fr Bernhard Eckerstorfer quoted extensively from the history of Sant'Anselmo which had first appeared in 1988. Its author, Pius Engelbert of Gerleve, had died the day before after a long life during which he had spent more than three decades at Sant'Anselmo — as a student, as a professor, and after his abbacy as an archivist. He was one of the living stones our house here in Rome.

Current events also have a repercussion on our life: The *Theologisches Studienjahr*, a German academic exposure program located at Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, had to be evacuated because of the imminent danger of war. Once again, the dean, professors and students were relocated at short notice to Rome and will be hosted at Sant'Anselmo.

We are also trying to follow the current Synod of Bishops. We have invited three synod members for fireside chats about their experience: Bishop Nin OSB, Cardinal Neemis from Trivandrum and Prof. Thomas Söding from Germany. That way our Anselmian community will get some insights into this much discussed ecclesial event.

### **Curia, Catalogus and Communication**

The secretariate of the Abbot Primate is traditionally called the "Curia". The experienced Mr Walter Del Gaiso continues as the chief point of contact there. He has now been joined by Fr Patrick Carter of Clear Creek (US) who brings a lot of expertise in IT to our place. Fr Patrick holds the official position of Secretary of the Abbot Primate. One of his big tasks will be the production of the Catalogus 2025. We expect to modernize data collection and Catalogus production substantially, in line with recent decisions of the Synod of Presidents who have advocated for a yearly update of the data.

Once the new Catalogus comes out, we will again have accurate figures for Benedictine men and women. The figures that were circulated in the news during the recent Congress - 22.000 Benedictines world wide - are certainly out of date. An educated guess is that we are currently 12.000 Benedictine women and 6000 monks. Soon we won't have to guess any more, I hope.

We are also going to look at the how the Curia and Sant'Anselmo connect with the Benedictine world, and how we can foster links and communication between the monasteries and Congregations. Traditional circular letters like this one may eventually be phased out in favour of emails, Confederation websites and social media. This will slowly be developed. There may be moments of trial and error. My request to you is that you are patient with us as we try this out, and cooperative when it comes to helping us to transform our ways of communication.

It has been a particular grace for me to come into this office at a time when Sant'Anselmo is in good shape. This is owed to many people. I want to mention in a special way Abbot Primate Gregory Polan who after eight years of work and dedication very gracefully handed everything over and then left for his home monastery, Conception Abbey in the US. And I want to thank Prior Fr Mauritius Wilde, who not only kept the Collegio in good shape during these past difficult years (Covid!, to mention but one challenge), but also carried the heavy load of the management of Congress on his shoulders. Many more could and should be mentioned here, but that would go beyond the scope of this letter.

2025 will be a Holy Year. Many will undertake a pilgrimage to Rome. If you, or groups of faithful connected to your community, plan to visit the Eternal City next year, please consider Sant'Anselmo a place of reference. We will be happy to welcome pilgrims from the monastic world for moments of recollection, prayer and celebration on the Aventine, in this your house!

Faternally

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremias OSB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Jeremias Schröder OSB

Your Abbot Primate

Rome, 15 October 2024

### *Contact information*

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### *Congress documents*

Congress participants will be able to access the Congress documents on the website until the end of the year.

### *Other links*

A video from the Congress of Abbots

<https://youtu.be/X5auDbDBOWw>

Pictures of the Congress of Abbots

[http://bit.ly/SA\\_flickr\\_foto](http://bit.ly/SA_flickr_foto)

Pictures of the Papal Audience

<https://photo.vaticanmedia.va/en/10388-01Vescovi204177-204514.html?page=3>

<https://photo.vaticanmedia.va/en/10403-11Gruppi211138-212864.html>

### **Below**

Message of Peace

## “Search Peace and Pursue It”

*RB Prol, Ps 34,14*

### Message from the Congress of Abbots 2024 to our Benedictine communities

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#### Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year’s Congress of Abbots did not have an official theme, but the issues of war and peace were ever present. We heard testimonies from afflicted communities in war-torn countries, from Ukraine, the Holy Land and Burkina Faso. During our encounter with Pope Francis, he said repeatedly “war is defeat”. At our Montecassino pilgrimage, the wanton destruction of this place 80 years ago resonated along with Paul VI’s apostolic letter of 1964 on St Benedict with the title “Pacis Nuntius” – the Messenger of Peace.

When we had an audience with Pope Francis, who knows a thing or two about religious life, he told us Benedictines: “peace is your thing”. And he added: “But start inside the monasteries!”

#### Starting inside the monasteries

The coming **Holy Year** is a chance to focus on our own peace: let us look at our houses as places where peace can grow. We want to invite our communities to face up to internal tensions, to confront current conflicts and old blockades, and to engage in rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation.

One of the messages of Saint Benedict is about **reconciliation and living together** across dividing lines. The Benedictine tradition emphasizes the equality of fellow monastics while respecting their diversity. This is a powerful tool of peace.

#### Radiate outwards

Can we pass on this diversity in living together as a message of peace during the Holy Year?

Our worldwide Benedictine presence and our concern for peace can come together in this Holy Year with a "Benedictine prayer for peace around the globe". We hope that monasteries can take turns so that each community is part of this **Benedictine prayer chain**, for example through weekly intercessions or moments of prayer at an indicated day and time.

During the Congress, representatives of the Holy See invited us to rediscover our age-old role as ecumenical bridge-builders, 100 years after Pope Pius XI first gave us this task officially. Partnerships between Orthodox monasteries and our Benedictine communities can become a bridge across the chasm that has opened between East and West in recent times.

Silence, which is the natural attitude of a monk, can be a space for meeting brothers and sisters of other faiths and religions. There are places – also digital ones – where **'silence for peace'** is practised by Christians in a spirit of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Another Benedictine hallmark is **hospitality**. When we allow others to share in our prayer, silence and daily rhythm, we help them to find peace.

Saint Benedict wants his disciples to "seek peace and to pursue it". This is an encouragement to 'step outside our own comfort zone'. When we face challenges or embark on new projects, we begin a way of transformation which can lead us to spiritual renewal.

When the wars in Ukraine and the Holy Land began, many Benedictine monasteries opened up and took in refugees. We are very grateful for this solidarity. Gratitude is a cornerstone of peacebuilding: gratitude to God and to our brothers and sisters for every gift received and given. Deep-seated gratitude has healing power and strengthens the process of reconciliation and peace. We encourage our communities to establish rituals to express gratitude on the path to peace.

We hope that this humble message of peace is received as an invitation to all our monastic brothers and sisters to become actively involved in peacebuilding. Let us be creative and find ways to build peace in our communities and in our world. And let us share across our Confederation how we do it: We want to be a truly peace-building worldwide family.

Abbot Primate Jeremias Schröder OSB

and more than 200 participants of the 2024 Congress of Abbots