

Dear Friends and Visitors

May began with three of us away.

Fr Anthony Sloan was still in Rome attending the Monastic Formators Program. See the News for February/March. As narrated in our last News update for April, Fr Alberic was attending the US Region's Novice Directors Meeting at St Benedict Monastery, Snowmass, CO, while Br Tobias was at Holy Spirit Abbey, Conyers, GA, for the International Meeting of Lay Cistercians.

On Ascension Thursday, a week after the return of Alberic and Tobias, Fr Mark took off for Mepkin Abbey, South Carolina, to participate in the US Regional Meeting. This is the annual meeting of the superiors of all the monasteries of the Order in the United States. The meeting extended from May 10 through May 17.

Besides the superiors of each of the monasteries, men's and women's, other participants included Dom Augustine Roberts, OCSO, Procurator General of the Order and English language member of the Abbot General's permanent Council; Dom Jacques Pneault, OCSO, invited observer from the Canadian Region; Sr Barbara Smickel, OCSO, and Fr Francis Michael Stiteler, OCSO, non-superior Regional delegates to the General Chapter; and Br Colombo Weber, secretary

While several important topics were addressed, the main thrust of this year's meeting was to prepare the superiors for the Order's triennial General Chapter scheduled for September of this year in Rome. Dom Augustine was invaluable in guiding the superiors through the numerous topics on the agenda for the General Chapter.

Among local US topics, two were of particular interest.

One of these was Cistercian Publications (CP). Fr M. Basil Pennington began CP in the early 1970's for the purpose of making the classical writers of the Cistercian patrimony available in sound English translation. The superiors of the US Regions are the "owners" of CP. As such, they have an interest in the way it functions, in its continued health, and in the unique position it holds in the publishing world. Dr Rozanne Elder, the editor and director of CP, spent a day at the meeting laying before the participants its current situation and engaging in dialogue. On the following day, the meeting was pleased to welcome Dr Gwendolyn Herder of Crossroads Publications, and Mr Peter Dwyer of Liturgical Press. These two experts in the publishing world were able to offer their own appreciation of CP, making helpful and practical suggestions for its management and ongoing renewal.

As a result of this input, the Region's superior constituted a small ad hoc committee from its members giving it the task of studying the question of CP. The ad hoc committee will give a preliminary report to the superiors when they are together again in September for the General Chapter.

The other topic of concern to the US Region is the fact of the aging of our communities. Several of our monasteries have large populations of older members, and some of these need special and long-term care. The superiors are trying creatively to face the challenge of providing for these seniors. This calls for, among other things, careful financial planning. It was to help us address this concern that the superiors invited to their meeting three representatives of the National Retired Religious Office (NRRO).

These gracious and competent religious spent half a day with us. They made presentations on the pastoral and spiritual care of the sick and the dying; tools for analyzing retirement needs and discerning levels of care; government programs available to help cover medical costs; methods for discerning whether and when to build, to renovate, or to outsource.

But by all accounts, the parts of the Regional Meeting that all prized the most and benefited from were the personal encounters and exchanges among the superiors, whether these were in the formal "pastoral sharings," or the informal meal times and casual conversations between sessions and in the evening. The Mepkin monks were superlative hosts, arranging everything in such a way that the visiting monks and nuns felt fully drawn into the life and fabric of the local community.

The heavy rains in May prevented the landscaping of our new cloister garth. The landscaping was finally done in early June. The next Assumption News, for June, will feature photographs of the new garth.

We are always grateful for our visitors and appreciative of the kind remarks they make on our web site and on our way of life. It is our deep desire to share our life with others, and this web site is one way we can do that. Another, of course, is by accepting and forming men who have the desire to give their life to God as a monk.

With this in mind, we are holding a "Come and See" Weekend for men, 18-45, interested in the monastic life. The "Come and See" will take place on the Labor Day weekend, August 30 - September 2, 2002. For more information and for an application, contact our vocations director, Fr Alberic.

Wishing you all a blessed, safe summer season.

Fr Mark, Abbot