

Newsletter 25

*To the Superiors,
the Regional Secretaries of the OCSO
and to the brothers and sisters
interested in formation.*



*For his loving kindness and his compassion he opened his side in order that
the blood of the wound might give you life,
the warmth of his body revive you,
the breath of his heart flow into you as if through a free and open passage.
(Guerric of Igny, S. 32)*

RAFMA

P. Justin tells us about the service he has rendered in the formation of Benedictine brothers of the Mambré Monastery, DRC.

I left for Kinshasa at the request of the Prior of Mambré Father Clément and Father Pierre, Prior of the monastery of Saint André at Clair Lande; in view of giving a boost to the formation of young brothers. Indeed, in the spirit of the Charity Charter, the community of Mokoto, through its Prior Dom Vedaste, wanted to respond favorably to this request given the good relations uniting these two communities.

I arrived in Kinshasa on January 7th and on the 8th we had a meeting with the superiors to identify together the emergencies for the initial and continuous formation of the community. The program was established from January 9 to February 24, 2020.



I found a community, of 14 solemn professed: 2 Indians, 5 priests: three in exercise, three brothers in studies, a brother in Kasanza. Three young professed, a novice and six postulants.

They try to inculturate their liturgy, the small hours are done in Lingala. The mass is animated in various chants: lingala, kikongo, French. Neighborhood Christians participate in Sunday Mass. I even experienced the Zairian / Congolese rite there, a fully participatory liturgy!

Here is a summary of the areas we have covered.



1. Liturgy. Plan:

I. Origin and explanation and the word "liturgy".

II. Nature of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council.

III. Importance of the liturgy in the life of the Church.

IV. The liturgical cycle.

V. The Eucharistic celebration.

VI. The mystery of the liturgy of the hours and the disposition of the heart.

VII. Outline of a history of the Roman liturgy.

VIII. Monastic rites.

IX. Symbols, signs and gestures in the liturgy.

2. Bible. We discussed the following topics:

How to open the Bible; Book or library? A people that rereads its life; Meaning of the text and literary genres; The great moments in the history of Israel; Hebrew Canon and Greek Canon; Catholic Canon and Protestant Canon; Formation of the Pentateuch.

3. Psalms. Plan: The origins of the psalms; Literary genres; Psaltery theology; Christian reading and monastic tradition; attempt of interpreting the psalms.

4. Music theory. Plan: the duration of the notes and the rests; measures and rhythms; alterations. Scale formation.

5. The RB. We followed the detailed plan of the book by Michael Casey ocso and David Tomlins ocso, *Introducing Benedict's Rule, A Program of Formation*, St. Ottilien, Germany, 2008.

6. Canon Law, Book II: People of God. Plan: being the longest of the 7, we address it in 4 themes: Right of people in the Church; Hierarchical constitution; Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life; Legal and associative persons.

We thank all those who made this fraternal mutual aid possible, in particular the superiors of the two monasteries and their members (Mambré osb and Mokoto ocso).

ORIENS

P. Samuel, Tarrawarra

The formators from the ORIENS English-speaking sub-region were supposed to meet in Matutum, Philippines from 20th to 28th May 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, the meeting was cancelled. So, we decided to keep in touch with each other through email. We started the first group discussion on issues in formation and subjects that were taught to those in formation. Currently, we are reading together an article on monastic formation in the 21st century and we will discuss on the main points together.

VONK video sessions

Br. Alberic, Schiermonnikoog

VONK is the name of a new formation program for novices and temporary professed of the Dutch and Flemish communities that live under the Rule of St. Benedict. At the end of 2020 the first cycle of five years (three weeks each year) was about to be accomplished. There was an evaluation in February this year which yielded a lot of praise. Also some adjustments were being made, of which the change of the thematic program was the most important. And then ... ready to go on after the evaluation, the corona-lockdown seemed to block any session. But the three members of the VONK-team found a digital way out: they developed video sessions. After the video sessions they wrote:

When we held a meeting in Brecht to evaluate the VONK operation, it was noted that the May session on monastic work would have a unique character due to the fact that this subject had not previously been included so far as a theme in the curricula of the OIMV (former program for novices), MVJ (former program for temporary professed) or VONK (the new program, a combination of OIMV and MVJ). The subject would neither be included in the new curriculum that will start next year. We could not have predicted that it would indeed be a special session, but for a very different reason: the meeting in Egmond was not possible because of the corona crisis.

As VONK-team we took the decision to organize a digital session after a lot of consultation and the necessary hesitation, hoping that it would be sufficient from a technical and substantive point of view to allow participants to get to work on the theme in a meaningful way and also to provide a degree of encounter.



A picture of the video session (Klaarland)

In retrospect, we are happy that we dared to do it. It was certainly not perfect technically, and we missed the opportunity for a real gathering and informal exchange, but the lessons were experienced as good and meaningful, and the exchange in groups also worked well. Br Christiaan's contribution with his own assignment for reflection and a personal testimony about his experience with monastic work was also a valuable part of the session. There were 13 participants from ten communities: 2 sisters oco, 1 sister osb, 5 brothers oco, 5 brothers osb.

One of the participants, brother Harold (Zundert), wrote a report of the digital sessions:

The digital VONK, originally planned to be held in the Abbey of Egmond, started with a practice session on Thursday afternoon, April 30. Everyone had to get used to using ZOOM (the brand of the video-session), also in terms of finding a good location in the various abbeys for a good connection and image. On Sunday evening, each participant received a "we-transfer" file that had to be downloaded, containing various texts and two lessons already recorded.

Monday morning started with a pre-recorded lesson of sr. Simone about the history of labour (work) and the vision of Hannah Ahrendt on it. The text of br. Dom Korneel was intended for self-study and the processing questions focused mainly on the relationship between prayer and labour.

Monday afternoon there was first a meeting and an exchange for the entire group, followed by a division into subgroups. How do you deal with work which you have been ordered to do and how is prayer functioning during the work? These questions proved to be fruitful for exchange.

*Tuesday morning self-study with a text by Hannah Ahrendt, church documents: *Gaudium et spes* and *Laudato si'*.*

On Tuesday afternoon, Sr. Simone "live" class via ZOOM, this went pretty well. Some participants occasionally dropped out due to a poor internet connection. The content of the lesson was about work and the vision of the Bible on labour, with much attention to the creation stories. The exchange in groups was done on the basis of the processing questions of the said texts of that morning.

On Wednesday morning one could watch an already recorded lesson on the subject of work and poverty (poverty is the VONK-theme of this year). This mainly concerned the inner attitude to work. Labour can be seen as one surrendering to the other. Personal questions provided the necessary reflection.

On Wednesday afternoon, a "live" lesson of Sr. Simone via ZOOM. The lesson was mainly about the motivation from which work is done and the quality with which the work is done. Not too much focus on what we do but how we do it.

The group exchange was about a text by Sr. Irene which had as content: work in the community. Seeing labour as a way of inner transformation through self-knowledge and motivation to want to grow in self-giving and acceptance of yourself. Be on your guard for pride and possessiveness, discovering new unsuspected talents.

Thursday morning an assignment from br. Christiaan: a personal reflection on work that you did in the past, outside the monastery and current experiences within the monastery. Awareness of the differences in the valuation of labour.

Thursday afternoon br. Christiaan a personal story about his various ministries in the abbey of Zundert with attention to the rule of Benedict and the thinking of Abraham Heschel. A concrete picture of rich experiences, questions and problems in multi-tasking and dealing with the various contacts outside the monastery.

At the end, the teachers received a gift as a thank you and this VONK was closed with satisfaction.

US

S. Pamela, Wrentham

We cancelled our Junior Seminar which was scheduled for late April. Since this is an annual event, we will just wait until 2021 and hope the situation allows for travel and gathering.

RE

F. Carlos María, Sobrado

All formation meetings throughout this year will be held by video-conference (Zoom platform).

Cistercian Patrimony Course

General theme: The Helfta Chair
Speaker: Miguel María (San Isidro)

- Mechtild of Magdeburgo: June 25 and 26
- Mechtild of Hackeborn: September 24 and 25
- Gertrud of Helfta: November 16 and 17

Novice Masters Course

Topic: Communicate to have quality relationships
Trainers: Francesc Bonada y Dani Muxi

From July 1 to 4: Four training mornings to learn (practicing) the basic concepts of Nonviolent Communication.

REMILA

S. María José, Hinojo

Last May, the REMILA formation secretariat launched the first part of a **distance course on the Cistercian Fathers**, by Fr. Bernardo Olivera under the title "*Introduction to the Cistercian Fathers and Mothers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*". It constitutes the introductory stage for the further study of the four evangelists of Cister: Bernard, Gueric, Ælred and William.

The purpose of the course is to know the sources of our spiritual heritage to allow an adequate adaptation to the present times and to the new cultural, social and religious circumstances that we will have to live.

It has as reference text the book "*Introducción a los Padres y Madres Cistercienses de los siglos XII y XIII*", Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2020 (Biblioteca Cisterciense).

The course is conducted entirely by email and each unit begins with a videoconference available on the web (this is optional). Each participant receives the base text accompanied by practical guidelines and has a personalized follow-up, since each one can advance in the program at their own pace and according to their possibilities.

The direct recipients of the course are the juniors and young professed solemn of the REMILA, however it is also open to the participation of monks with more years of profession in our region.

The program to follow consists of the following thematic units:

1. Purpose

-Charismatic purpose of our Founders

2. **Authors**

- Mystics XII and XIII centuries
- Most important Cistercian fathers and mothers

3. **Motivations**

- Acronyms of the Works of the Cistercian Fathers
- Why read to our Fathers and Mothers
- Our Mystagogues and Mystagogues

4. **Methodology**

- How to read, study and communicate to our Fathers and Mothers
- Introduction to monastic sermons
- Ways of access
- Two reading programs and something else

5. **Doctrine**

- Synthesis of fundamental themes
- Female mystics and their experiences
- Love in Cistercian spiritual theology
- Faculties of the soul

6. **Context**

- Cultural, socio-political and religious environment
- Rule of Saint Benedict and monastic theology

7. **Instruments**

- Cistercian Magazines
- Selected bibliography of Cistercian spirituality

8. **Aggiornamento**

- Cister, today and tomorrow

We would like to thank F. Bernardo for his diligent interest in the area of formation and his generous availability for the guidance and accompaniment of this course.