



Central Secretariat for Formation – OCSO –
May 2023

Newsletter 34

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

What already happened...

ISLES

(Sr. Sarah)

Formators meeting

Monks and nuns in the Region of the Isles Cistercian communities responsible for guiding new members through the initial formation process gathered at *Mellifont Abbey, Co. Louth, Ireland* from *28th February until 4th March 2023* for the purposes of further training, collaboration and support. In attendance were Fr. Rufus and Fr. Bavo, Mellifont Abbey, Sr. Edith and Sr Usia, Holy Cross Abbey, Whitland, Wales, Sr. Christina and Sr. Renata from TautraMariakloster in Norway, Br. Barry, from Sancta Maria Abbey, Nunraw, Scotland, Fr. John and Fr. Denis Luke, Mount Melleray Abbey, and Sr. Mary Helen, Hynning Monastery, U.K. (Bernardine Cistercians d'Esquermes), Sr. Ann, Junior Director and Sr. Sarah, Novice Director, at St. Mary's Abbey, Glencairn.

The meeting included a two day workshop on the various aspects of the vocation discernment journey together with exploring formative relationships and human development in initial formation. The input and facilitation was conducted by clinical psychologists **Gerard Perry** and **Rosario Power**. Topics covered were:

- ✓ Assessment of Candidates
- ✓ Human Development
- ✓ Formation Relationships
- ✓ Formator Supports (Supervision)
- ✓ Applicants Journey
- ✓ Postulant / Novice Development (Stages & Challenges)

The formators also visited the site of the first Cistercian foundation in Ireland at Old Mellifont Abbey (1142), Co. Louth, Ireland. We are indebted to Gerard Perry and Rosario Power for the enrichment we gained for our formation ministry from their shared expertise and professional experience as well as to the community at Mellifont Abbey for their warm hospitality. The spiritual and temporal support of the host monastic community held us and gave us the freedom to engage deeply both in the workshop and in our sharing that resulted in a very worthwhile and enjoyable meeting. We hope to meet on a two-yearly basis for further training and mutual support.



Junior Course October, 2022

Last year's in-person gathering of juniors in the Region of the Isles had originally been scheduled to take place at Mellifont Abbey in 2020 only to be postponed due to the pandemic to the 'safe' end of this year, autumn 2022. Yet, some in Mellifont Abbey got the Covid virus just days before we were due to travel there and the course had to be relocated to Roscrea where Fr. Malachy, the community and the guesthouse staff pulled out all the stops to accommodate the group at the midnight hour. We would very much like to thank both Mellifont Abbey for all their preparations, and Mount St Joseph Abbey for finding room for us at the last minute! This unexpected turn of events proves that we are blessed with a lively spirit of hospitality in our region.

The seminar, presented by scripture scholar **Margaret Daly Denton**, was entitled *'Listening with the Ear of an Earth-Caring Heart: Reading St John's Gospel in the light of the Ecological Crisis'*. The curved conference room in the guesthouse at Roscrea with its uplifting view of the Abbey woods through its large windows made for a very fitting venue.

Before the course began we were treated to a tour of the centuries-old enclosed garden in the grounds of the Abbey that the students of Cistercian College Roscrea have been working on and bringing back to life. The juniors were also given a guided tour of the prayer walk through the woods also created by the students which had been designed by Fr. Aodhán and Paddy Smyth, a member of staff at Cistercian College Roscrea. These outdoor facilities have been an invaluable spiritual resource for the local people and all visitors to the Abbey, particularly during the pandemic. For the purposes of our

junior seminar, we couldn't have asked for a better prelude to the scripture seminar with its ecological theme than this outdoor experience in the grounds of the Abbey.

Margaret began her presentation developing the theme of creation in John's Gospel by focusing on the importance of gardens both in the ancient near east and in John's Gospel, exploring their deeper biblical meaning. Gardening, caring for the earth, is a primary human task in biblical thought. Adam's role in the Garden of Eden was to care for the garden, to till the ground. Because of sin, in the story of Cain and Abel the ground is cursed and no longer yields, something that we can see throughout the contemporary world. The people of Israel associated gardens with Eden and had a strong sense of living in banishment from the Garden of Eden. Restoration in Jewish thought – contemporary with Jesus and with the writing of the Gospel – was very often described as a restoration or re-admission to the Garden of Eden, the earth that had been ravished becoming again like the Garden of Eden. Jesus, the evangelist of the fourth Gospel tells us, often met with his disciples in the garden and Margaret drew out the symbolism of that choice of location; Mary Magdalene 'sup-posed him to be the gardener' in the resurrection narrative. When the risen Jesus appears in the garden, he signals a renewal of all creation. This new creation inaugurated by the incarnation is further expressed through Jesus' identification with bread and water, "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35), "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them" (Jn 7:37). John's Gospel needs to be read and re-read, Margaret reminded us, at both a literal and symbolic level, to capture its range of irony and profundity of meaning. Her lectures demonstrated the importance of a broader knowledge of the scriptures underlying this Gospel, a breadth of knowledge of the scriptures that she herself admirably displayed in her conferences together with her creative PowerPoint presentation including inspiring images, video and music to further illustrate her deeply engaging teaching.

During the week the juniors took a day trip, beginning with a tour of Newgrange and Knowth, the world heritage megalithic tombs in Co. Westmeath dating from 3,200 b. C. Following the tour we had an enjoyable dinner together, followed by a visit to Monasterboice, a sixth century Celtic monastic site, one of over 200 Celtic monastic ruins located throughout Ireland. We prayed the office of None beside one of the famous 1,000 year old high crosses on the site. Then we drove just ten minutes further up the road to the substantial remains of Old Mellifont Abbey, the first Cistercian foundation made in Ireland in 1142. This new monastery from the continent was considered huge to the Celtic Christians in its day. There we celebrated an evening Mass in the ruins of the church presided by Fr. Aodhán,



a monk from Roscrea who had joined us on our trip, before heading back to Roscrea for the remainder of the course. We enjoyed so much meeting with and joining the monks for the Divine Office and community Eucharist in the Abbey church during our few days at Roscrea. The monastic friendship and hospitality of the monks and the guesthouse staff was superb, so warm and welcoming... it was hard to say goodbye! We keep each other in prayer as each one's formation journey continues.

What is going on...

ISLES *Juniors New Testament course*. Weekly zoom course (Twelve sessions) from *april to june 2023*. Since Tuesday, March 28, Dr. **Margaret Daly Denton**, presenter of the junior Seminar at Roscrea in 2022, is teaching a weekly class via zoom introducing the New Testament to those in initial formation in the Region of the Isles. Each session lasts 90 minutes (with a break) on Tuesdays at 3pm GMT (UK/ Irish time).

USA Region's *Junior Seminar* is being held at *Spencer* since *April 24* until *May 6, 2023*. A sister from Wrentham and a brother from Mepkin are participating in an online New Testament course offered by the Region of the Isles.

What is going to happen...

REM (Sr. Fatima)

In the month of *May, from 8 to 12*, the usual meeting of Italian formators will take place in *Vitorchiano*. The theme will be: *Liturgical experience and spiritual senses*. **Dom Loris Tomassini, OCSO** will give three conferences: 1. The sensitive in the liturgy. 2. Liturgy and spiritual senses. 3. The mystical experience of the mystery in the liturgy. **Fr. Francesco La Rocca, OSB**, will also give three conferences, on the same theme of the spiritual senses, on Origen and Gregory of Nyssa.

REMILA (Sr. María Antonia)

The regional secretary informs about the next four formative talks by **Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO** on *«Gender Ideological Theory»*. It will be via zoom in the month of *May*, on *Saturdays 6, 13, 20 and 27*. At 1:30 p.m. Mexico time. Each talk lasts about 45 minutes. It is expected to be able to share the recordings for those who are interested.

The formators of the **ORIENS** Region will meet in *Rawaseneng* from *June 1 to 9*.

CNE, with the other 3 French-speaking regions, are organizing a formation meeting for this European summer. Registration is open until the end of June.

ISLES: Junior Seminar *16 - 23 July*. **Dom Elias Dietz**, Abbot of Gethsemani Abbey, USA will be presenting this year's junior course on *The Writings of St Ælred* at *Mount St Bernard Abbey, UK*. The seminar will include a visit to the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey in North Yorkshire founded in 1132.

We hope to be able to report on these meetings in the next Newsletters.