

Newsletter 36

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

RAFMA

Sr. Elizabeth

*Self-reliance/Sustainability in accordance with the rule of St. Benedict
and the current signs of times
Butende, June 2023*



BECUEA East Africa (Benedictines and Cistercians) group photo with the community of Butende

This was a six-day seminar, and the facilitator was **Brother Theodore Mwenda**, a Benedictine monk from Hanga Abbey in Tanzania, with a long experience in the knowledge of self-sustainability and entrepreneurship. We thank the benefactors who continually support this cause and the welfare of our brothers and sisters in formation.

The seminar began in the morning with a down pour of rain. It was a nice welcome for the group of young vibrant brothers and sisters in formation (novices) in the Benedictine and Cistercian family (BECUEA) together with their formators in the East African Region. They were so eager to tour around the monastery premises as an introductory part of the orientation.

Because of the rain there was a change in the program and Mother Jane Abbess of Our Lady of Praise, welcomed the group with a short history of the beginnings of Cistercian life at Butende. The session continued with the introductory part as all the formators introduced themselves with those with whom they came. This was a moment of getting to know each other to help facilitate an atmosphere of feeling at home.

They were six congregations:

- Benedictine monks of Tigoni Kenya 6 members,
- Benedictine monks Tororo Uganda, these were 4 members,
- Benedictine nuns Grace and Compassion Kenya 8 members,
- Tutzing sisters of Karen Nairobi 6 members,
- Cistercian monks Our Lady of Victoria Uganda, 5 members,
- Benedictine Nuns of the Holy Trinity Arua Uganda, 5 members and
- Butende at present has no Novices but the Novice Mistress attended.



Novices from Tororo Benedictine monks planting a tree at the end of the seminar



Tutzing Novices of Karen



Benedictines of Grace and Compassion

A summary of the work is presented in the attached file, *Entrepreneurship*.

Our two **junior sisters** also attended a seminar held in *Nairobi* for two weeks. It started on the *16th* and ended on the *29th of July 2023*.

The topics covered were:

- Monastic/Benedictine Spirituality by Sr. Scholastica from Tororo
- Safeguarding of minors by Sr. Magdalene CCUI
- Team building by Mr. Steven
- Stewardship in monastic communities by Fr. Tesha OP
- Canon law by Fr. Leonard Okuku

The sisters were very happy for the experience and knowledge they gained as they shared with the community. In between they had some visits to Tigoni Benedictine monks in Nairobi and specially to experience the African Bible on the Ground, they also visited the Ruaraka communities. On the last day they had a social evening and on the 29th they departed each to their different monastery. Thanks to the benefactors!

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P. Carlos Ma.

Isaac of Stella

Continuing with the annual (*online*) formation on the Cistercian Fathers, open to the participation of all members of the communities, in *November 2023* we studied Isaac of Stella under the guidance of **Dom Elias Dietz**, abbot of Gethsemani.

Dom Elias has published several studies on early Cistercian authors in various journals, including the *American Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, of which he was editor from 2003 to 2007.

As for Isaac de Stella, without being exhaustive, he published several articles in *Cistercian Studies*, including one on his biography (CSQ, 2006), a critical edition and translation of the Letter on the Canon of the Mass (*Cîteaux, 2014*), wrote the introduction to the American edition of *The Liturgical Sermons* and, in 2022, the prestigious collection *Sources Chrétiennes* published *The Letter on the Soul* and *The Letter on the Canon of the Mass*, which had an important collaboration of Dom Elias in the introduction and notes.

These are the topics that were developed during the 5 sessions of the course:

- William and Isaac: similarities and contrasts.
- Isaac's life.
- Isaac's works: Letters-treatises (*De Anima* and *De Canone*); Sermons.
- Reading guide.
- Isaac's style.
- Study of sermon 14 on acedia.
- Study of sermon 51 on the Assumption of Mary: The Church and the Total Christ.
- Letter on the Canon of the Mass.
- Information on the Ancient Cistercian Mass.

Inhabiting the routine

Illuminating our daily life through the daily life of Jesus

In *January and February 2024*, we have held an *online* course of theological-spiritual formation with the theologian **Margarita Saldaña**, who belongs, as a consecrated laywoman, to the spiritual family of Charles de Foucauld. She has a degree in Journalism (Complutense

University of Madrid) and in Dogmatic Theology (Pontifical University of Comillas). Her main fields of research are the theology of daily life and the spirituality of care. She collaborates with theology and spirituality magazines and is part of a research group in Paris on the figure of Charles de Foucauld.

With the theme: *Inhabited Routine - Illuminating our daily life through the daily life of Jesus*, the aim of this formation was to a) deepen the meaning of daily life as a place of human and spiritual fulfillment; b) rediscover the Christological anchorage of Christian everyday life; c) question one's own experience of daily life in the heart of the monastic vocation.

This course was also open to the participation of all the members of the communities. After the first three sessions, the speaker provided us with a reflection guide to encourage individual and community deepening of the themes. Several communities expressed their gratitude for the benefits that this formation provided them.

“Training” in Psychogeriatrics Course on mental disorders in the elderly

In recent years, in order to respond to the needs felt by the communities, which are getting progressively older, we have proposed some formation sessions in the field of health care. This year, during the month of *May*, over 8 *online* sessions, we held the “Course on mental disorders in the elderly”, coordinated by **Drs. Manuel Martín** and **Manel Sanchez**, psychiatrists working in centers of the Hospitallers Sisters.

In addition to the communities of the Order, the course was open to the participation of other communities of contemplative life. The sessions, of two hours each, are recorded and available on the Youtube channel of the Formation Secretariat.

Course program:

1. Mental symptoms in old age: their importance and how to recognize them (Dr. Manel Sánchez)
2. Cognitive impairment and dementia: reality of the problem, how it is detected, how it evolves (Dr. Manuel Martín).
3. Cognitive impairment and dementia: how they are treated, how they are cared for (Dr. Cristina Pujol).
4. Mood disorders: depression, bipolar disorder. The problem of suicide (Dr. Manel Sánchez).
5. Anxiety and sleeping disorders (Dr. M^a Dolores Franco).
6. Thought disorders: psychosis, schizophrenia, paranoia (Dr. Anna Catalán).
7. Difficult personalities: personality disorders in old age (Dr. Javier Olivera).
8. Pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments. The role of the caregiver (Dr. Manel Sánchez).

Novice directors' course

Culture of good treatment and prevention of abuses in formation: Practice good zeal with the most ardent love (RB 72,3) is the theme of this year's course for masters of novices, which will be given by **Antonio Carrón de la Torre, OAR**, professor at the Institute of Anthropology of the Gregorian University, from *July 1 to 6*, at *the Monastery of San Isidro*. The topic of abuses was dealt with at GC 2022, where a new Constitution on this matter was approved and a paragraph was added to the *Ratio Institutionis*, insisting on the need to provide formation to all members of the Order. Abuses (spiritual, power, sexual) are a fundamental issue for the formation of formators.

Junior Seminar 2024

May 3 saw the arrival of 12 of the region's simply professed at the welcoming *Mepkin Abbey* in the state of *South Carolina*. The monks and nuns were coming together for two weeks of study, prayer, monastic leisure and an immersion in the local Mepkin community life.

Fr. Joseph van House, OCist from Our Lady of Dallas Abbey in Irving, Texas led the first week's seminar on "*Liturgy and Life*". Texts from Louis Bouyer, John Henry Newman, Joseph Ratzinger and Michael Lang (on Augustine) formed the starting points for five days of lecture, dialogue and synthesis in the mornings and in the afternoons the brothers and sisters met in small groups with questions for discussion provided by Fr. Joseph. The discussions were to deepen the understanding of the morning's topics and to lead to an integration of the learning with the monastics' daily lives in their home monasteries.

Fr. Joseph teaches at the University of Dallas. His research interests include John Henry Newman, Cistercian theology, theological *ressourcement*, and fundamental Christology. Currently he is working on a book entitled "A Reed after Trumpets: the Schools, the Cistercians, and Geoffrey of Auxerre's Exposition of the Song of Songs". As an experienced and accomplished teacher, he elicited comments from the group with ease and encouragement. His love for Cistercian life and his vocation permeated all his teaching and example during the days he was present.



As a break between the two weeks of study the brothers and sisters participated in the Mepkin community's weekly desert day of greater silence and solitude for prayer and reading. That day of monastic leisure transitioned to the second week with **Fr Simeon Leiva, OCSO** of St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer. Using a critical edition of St Augustine's Confessions (translated into English), Fr Simeon lead the seminar in a close reading of texts from the first ten books of

the Confessions. The overall topic was *"Augustine's Confessions: A Guide for Monastic Living"*. Enthusiasm for the Augustine's text and the life we share as Cistercian monks and nuns animated all morning sessions. As during the first week, afternoon discussions further enriched the day's learning.

Mepkin Abbey sits on land rich in American history beginning the Cherokees and the Catawbas and other smaller tribes of Native Americans, followed by the descendants of European settlers who established large plantations, including the Mepkin plantation. To cultivate these large tracts of land led to the enslavement of countless West Africans who had the skills to cultivate rice. The remnants of dykes and rice fields can still be seen on the property. Some descendants of the enslaved people form the Gullah Geechee people of Carolina and some of their settlements are across the Cooper River that serves as the western boundary of the monastery's property. There are several sites on the Mepkin property to remember these peoples, both cemeteries for slave owner family and the enslaved and these are open to the public. More recently a Meditation Garden of Truth and Reconciliation has opened to the public. During their time at Mepkin Abbey the Region's Juniors had a chance learn about this history and the Mepkin community's life and prayer for reconciliation for all the peoples who inhabited the land before them.

For two weeks the Juniors ate with the Mepkin brothers, prayed with them and came to love both the monks and the land. They studied and took long walks. So it was with both sadness of leaving behind and enriching experience, and a joy to return to their home monasteries, that all departed May 17 for the long journeys home.

