

## **RAFMA SUPERIORS WORKSHOP HELD AT OUR LADY OF PRAISE ABBEY BUTENDE 2024**

This RAFMA meeting was held from the 5th to the 17th of July 2024. This was as a result of the vote that happened at Scourmont in the last Region meeting encouraged by the Abbot General in Support of formation. There were 16 superiors present, Madre Rachel Counsel Member of the Abbot General and two absent. A few days after the start of the workshop Mother Anna Chiara could not continue with the group because she was not feeling very well.

During this time there were two important celebrations: the 60th anniversary of the foundation of Our Lady of Praise Butende, which was on the 5th of July 2024 and the Solemn Profession of Brother Kizito of Our Lady of Victoria on the Solemnity of our Father Saint Benedict on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2024. These were two great moments of fraternal communion and of strengthening our following of Christ in the Order where we feel at home everywhere!

The meeting was opened with a welcoming word from Mother Jane and there after Dom John Bosco gave an introduction of what would happen in the following days. The workshop was organized into two parts. The time of the conferences centered on two main points, and the time of exchanges between superiors as a region on points that affect us directly, in particular those suggested to all the regions of the Order by the Abbot General.

### **1. Time for conferences.**

They had two types of conferences. The first concerned spiritual life and the second was based on the issue of human resources management.

a. The spiritual conference. This was a conference based on the issue of purgatory, which is no longer much talked about in the Church, but the consideration of which brought us back to our fundamental vocation, which is to intercede for ourselves and for the world, and in particular for our deceased brothers and sisters. One of the

focal points of this conference was the need to examine one's conscience, to find out whether we are remaining true to our vocation or whether we are becoming diluted by a general dulling and loss of spiritual values. For it is a reality that we can be in the monastery, yet living other values that are contrary to it. The preacher insisted on this point so that superiors can help their communities to refocus on this requirement, which is very similar to that of keeping one's thoughts in mind.

b. Conferences concerning the management of human resources. As superiors and therefore responsible, the need to manage human resources. This is something that can be learned and that enables us to better fulfill the responsibility of leading men and women, our brothers and sisters, in harmony and peace, in order to achieve together the goal that our community has set itself. These conferences focused in turn on five themes:

- Management and accountability;
- Overview of human resources management,
- Effective communication
- Introduction to strategic planning,
- Introduction to project planning and management.

## **2. Points for reflection proposed by Mother Eleanor, were also discussed in language groups**

- **Ongoing Formation.** What are the positive things happening in our communities with regard to ongoing formation, and what things need to be improved?

We recognize that ongoing formation is a necessity for every Christian, especially consecrated persons. Below are of some of the responses

- There are good study programs in our communities

- Willingness of members to assist in formation, especially those who have acquired good training
- Lectio Divina is a monastic practice of formation and therefore a need to encourage brothers and sisters to be diligent
- Good homilies and chapter talks
- Annual retreats which help in spiritual growth.
- Monthly recollections and confessions
- Reading and reflecting on the Abbot General's letter especially that of Synodality
- Studying Scripture together.
- Community meetings and dialogues which facilitate peace and unity
- In Nigeria for example there is a BECAN Institute for monastic studies

### **What needs to be improved?**

*Sending brothers and sisters for scholarly studies to deepen their understanding and love of monastic life.*

*Deeper study of the Rule of St. Benedict*

*The challenge to meet the cost of ongoing formation due to high costs of teachers' salaries and the problem of internet connections. The problem of generation differences (age) the fact that some people are not open to training.*

*A need to create a budget and a special fund*

- **Initial Formation.** What are the positive things happening in our communities with regard to initial formation, and what things need to be improved? Some responses

- In some French-speaking monasteries, there are refresher courses in French for newcomers
- This is complemented by other courses such as catechesis, self-knowledge, knowledge of Jesus and knowledge of others, knowledge of the community and the history of the community.

- In general, we think that the young people who come to join us should be trained by the members of our communities to ensure that they integrate well, because the community as a whole must be able to provide formation.

### **What needs to be improved?**

1. Some monasteries are obliged to reduce the number of new entrants due to the large number of requests.
2. Training more members for the purpose of good quality formators in the region
3. Some formators have a heavy workload, for example caring for a big group (novices, postulants and aspirants) it's a challenge
4. One of the challenges we face is that of language: how to ensure that in our communities, many of us learn other languages in addition to French or English.
5. We need a good discernment of vocations in our region, preferably as a team, with the possibility of calling on external qualified personnel.
6. We need to form young people with a common vision, to ensure the unity of our communities.
7. Interference from other members of the community (self-proclaimed formators), sometimes conflict between the superior and the formators, and the fact that the community is not formative when the elders do not set a good example.

In nutshell, the workshop was very much appreciated by the participants. They shared good moments and encouraged each other in pastoral sharing. Gratitude to Mother Jane and to the community, who did everything possible to make this meeting pleasant, studious and relaxing.

Our gratitude also goes to the President of the Region, Dom Jean-Bosco, who led the group with great tact and dedication. Lastly but not of least importance, our gratitude goes to our dear Dom Bernardus, who did everything in his power to ensure that the funding needed to organize this meeting was available.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Dom Vincent and the whole Spencer community, who generously made available the funds we needed to hold our meeting.



Group photo with the Bishop of the Diocese of Masaka Rt. Rev. Serverus Jjumba, on the anniversary of the foundation of Our Lady of Praise Abbey Butende.

Sr. Elizabeth.