



Common Letter No. 30 M. Angela Strobel, OSB Rome, Mission Sunday October 23, 2011

My dear Sisters all over the world,

"Wherever the stream flows it will bring life." -
Conversatio Morum and New Evangelization.

My last letter launched the preparation for our 12th General Chapter; today on Mission Sunday, I would like to encourage you to let the stream within you flow according to the words of Jesus: *Whoever believes in me, streams of life—giving water will pour out from her heart.* Marvellously, things are converging. During our next General Chapter, the Church will not only celebrate the Synod on New Evangelization but start the celebration of the "Year of Faith". Is it a coincidence that our Constitutions describe the way of our Profession, of our *Conversatio Morum* as a way of faith?: *In his gratuitous love Jesus Christ has called us to follow him in religious life. Responding to the call we set out in faith to walk his way under his guidance (II,1)*

The "tree of life" in the mosaic of San Clemente Church in Rome, which decorates our prayer booklet for the General Chapter, produces a great variety of flowers enrolled in vine branches. Today, I would like to show you some flowers growing and blossoming in some parts of our Congregation.

Recently, we had our Visitation in the Iberian Priory, or rather, in Spain and Portugal, because the visitation in Angola was already done two years ago. In Madrid, the enthusiasm of the World Youth Day could still be felt. Our Sisters have hosted groups in Carabanchel and in Parla. The community is small, yet they have an intensive work with Oblates. During our stay two ladies, one Spanish and the other a Peruvian, made their oblation. Since our last visitation 8 years ago, we could see here and especially in Portugal, that our Sisters did and do endure and persevere where there is little hope of growth. For almost 25 years there has been no Portuguese vocation. Yet we could see in Baltar and in Torres Novas that the Church is alive. In both places a lively catechetical and pastoral work is going on; new or renovated buildings for this purpose are an external sign. Our Sisters have a big share in this new life. The priest in Baltar assured us that something is moving in the society and the church in Portugal. There are vocations for the priesthood; the young women are slower in this movement, but would be coming ...

However, there are two Sisters preparing for Final Profession in Torres Novas, an Angolan and a Chilean, and there are many more in the Congregation. The so called Pan-African Intensifier's Program is going on at this time in Nairobi. In reality it is almost a "pan-continental" one since besides the four Sisters from Nairobi, there are two from India and two from Germany. In addition, three Sisters are preparing for final profession in Windhoek and one in Sorocaba. All of them ask for our prayer to accompany them to their final commitment.

On the first two weeks of September, three of us Missionary Benedictines, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, Prioress of Manila, Sr. Vania Maria Toscano, Prioress of Olinda and myself, had a unique experience in West Africa, Togo, Ghana and Benin. Unfortunately, Sr. Lumen Choi,

Prioress of Daegu and delegate for East Asian Region, could not come. It was the yearly meeting of the CIB (*Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*) and at the same time the celebration of its 10th Anniversary. The CIB was born in 2001 in Nairobi, but before its beginnings in Nairobi, there was already a long process of preparation. Mother Edeltrud Weist and Mother Irene Dabalus were involved in this process. Really, 20 years ago, who could imagine Benedictine nuns and Sisters united, and who could imagine cloistered nuns - abbesses travelling hours and hours through the African bush to visit and meet daughters of St. Benedict in other far away places and cultures? This happened in the CIB Meeting. It is a little miracle that nothing of that historical and canonical distinction between nuns and Sisters can be felt. The difficulties and surprises and some anxieties of the journey created an intense solidarity among the CIB members present, which by the way, is the first of the 2010-2014 CIB Goals. We visited three women's monasteries in a great distance, the Assumption Monastery in Dzogbegan and the Monastery of the Emmanuel in Sadori, Togo. The latter is a foundation of Dzogbegan and is an interesting one, being a foundation in the bush and in a Moslem area.

In the country of Benin we were guests in the Monastery of St. Joseph in Toffo. Then, on the long way back to Lome, the Capital of Togo, we reached the city of Ouidah, which is still in Benin. In this city was erected, with the help of UNESCO, a pilgrims' way: "The way of the Slaves", showing in a number of stations the terrible sufferings that slaves went through before being taken away. Also in Ouidah, we "inaugurated" the new road to the Seminary which is under construction for Pope Benedict's visit this November.

Here in Rome we have at the moment a full house, both in the *clausura* and in the guesthouse. The Preparatory Commission started working last Monday. As far as we can see, they are working harmoniously, and are organized, fast, and prayerful. They surely will accomplish well the task given for this month's stay in Rome. The Prioresses will receive the guidelines for their report and all the Sisters will get some help for working out the proposals.

October is a very crowded time in Rome, with pilgrims and tourists everywhere. Just now we have in our house a mixed group of Christians and Muslims. This past July, we had a refugee who had fled from the war in Libya, he was with a family here in Italy who offered him some days of rest in our guesthouse. I cannot help but share with you the lines he wrote us: " Dear esteemed Sisters, I am pleased writing to you, I really appreciate your unique hospitality and wish to let many muslims to know how great is Christianity in dealing with people regardless of their race or religion. With gratitude, sincerely yours, Omran Abdusalam Elansi".

A short Generalate schedule forecast: November will bring us to Tutzing for the Prioress' election. Sr. Adelaida will participate in the 50th Anniversary celebration of AIM in Liguge, France. In December, a short visit to India by Sr. Maoro and myself is on the schedule. Next year starts in full blast with the Election in Manila. Two visitations are still to be done - in Bulgaria and Haus St. Benedikt - in January and February. In February the Pan-African Meeting of Prioresses and Formators will take place in Windhoek.

I take this chance to inform you that on September 11, Sr. Rosa Maria Santana was installed Superior in Zarevbrod. We thank Sr. Beate Schroeter for her wholehearted service as superior of Bulgaria for the past 7 years, and wish her a good and rejuvenating time of rest and home visit with her family.

In our fast-moving world we always have to plan, even years ahead. Thus Sr. Lucida Schmieder, whom many of you know, especially from the retreats guided by her for the encounterers in Rome during the last 15 years or so, will terminate her service in the Katholisches Evangelisationszentrum in Maihingen, Germany by end of next year. The plan is to return to her "first mission" that is, in Olinda Priory.

Last but not least, I take this opportunity to thank you all for your loving congratulation letters, prayers and gifts for my name day, the memory of Blessed Angelo Roncalli, Pope John XXIII.

Above all I thank each and everyone for her commitment to our way of life, you who "hear the Lord's message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and bear fruit through perseverance" Lk 8,15)

Lovingly,

Sr. Angela Strubel O.S.B.