



# BENEDICTINE ABBEY NEWSLETTER

ST MARK'S ABBEY – PO BOX 111 – CAMPERDOWN  
VICTORIA – 3260 – AUSTRALIA



**SUMMER 2008–2009**

## ABBAY NEWS

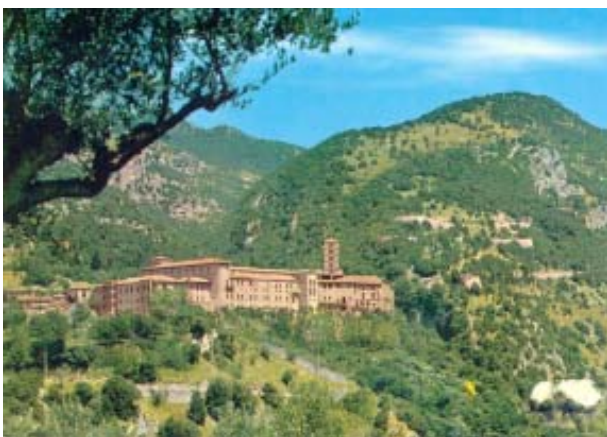
Our newsletter begins with Christmas 2007. Midnight Mass was reasonably attended, followed by a reception, as is our custom. "Off to bed" as Samuel Pepys would say, "for an early arising". Lauds followed by Mass of the Day with its beautiful entrance antiphon *Puer natus est* and Gregorian chant. *O admirabile commercium!*

Father Abbot continued with his excellent homilies linking the birth of Christ in an arc to Easter; to the great events of Christ's birth, baptism and to his Passion, Death and Resurrection. There cannot be any separation. Similarly the event of Christ's resurrection at Easter continues in an arc through to Pentecost. Desultory attendance in the parishes at the Sunday Mass fragments the understanding of salvation history.

On December 27<sup>th</sup> we received a letter from Abbot President Dom Bruno Marin OSB, issued to the monasteries of the Subiaco Congregation. It was a delight to listen to his message read at our daily chapter meetings. The letter stressed the necessity of perseverance in difficult times, and the value of holding on to hope. This was also the title of Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, which we read in the refectory during the year.

In September of 2008, the General Chapter of the Subiaco Congregation was held in Subiaco, Italy. Father Abbot attended the Chapter and his reflections are on page 8. Following the Chapter meeting he stayed with Sylvestrine Abbot-General Michael Kelly at their Rome house. While in Rome, Father Abbot was also able to catch up with the Very Rev'd David Richardson, former Dean of Melbourne, when he attend Mass and lunch at the Anglican Centre.

From Rome he went to England where he stayed at Elmore and West Malling Abbeys and with Bishop David and Helen Farrer.



*The Abbey of St Scholastica, Subiaco which hosted the General Chapter of the Congregation in September*

## GUEST HOUSE

The number of guests staying in the guest house has risen considerably over the past twelve months. Whether it has been a result of the TV documentaries *The Monastery*, filmed at Worth Abbey, England, or *The Abbey* filmed at Jamberoo Abbey, New South Wales, or the film *Into Great Silence* concerning Carthusian life, we cannot say, but it has been our joy to welcome these people to Camperdown.

Amongst them was Alastair McKay from England who spent a month of his sabbatical with us in January-February. Other guests have come from various parts of Australia, England, Switzerland, Canada, France and Mauritius.

## MISCELLANEOUS MONASTIC NEWS

In February we attended the ordination to the diaconate of our oblate, Philip Bewley, in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, and afterwards the reception at St Peter's Eastern Hill, Melbourne. We look forward to his priesting in November.

The Bishop of Wangaratta, the Rt Rev'd David Farrer, was with us for a few days in Holy Week. We said farewell to him on Good Friday, as he left after Easter to take up a new appointment in the Diocese of Chichester, England. He will be greatly missed. We appreciated his friendship, help and advice over many years, particularly as confessor to the community. He was always very supportive of Benedictine life and of our Abbey. Father Abbot attended a farewell reception for Bishop David and his wife Helen, at Bishops court, Melbourne.

A service for the Anzac commemoration was held in the abbey church on Sunday April 20 which Father Abbot conducted. Initially welcoming all present, he reminded everyone that we bring thanks to God for the peace and security that we enjoy, and for the courage, sacrifice and devotion of those who gave their lives in times of war. Later there was a chance to catch up with friends, a chat and a cuppa.

Father Abbot presented a seminar paper entitled *Is there a place for monasticism in the twenty-first century*, held at St Peter's Hall, Eastern Hill, and organised as part of the yearly programme of the Institute of Spiritual Studies. Father Abbot described the life as uneventful but also as remarkable. Given the wide-spread influence of Benedictine monasticism in the church and the world through the centuries, an influence found in scholasticism, liturgical life, and agrarianism, it is interesting to look at the way in which monasticism may have some bearing on Christian life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While the Benedictine Rule was written for a group of men living celibate lives in the sixth century, today the people who put the teachings of the Rule into practice are married and single, women and men of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Rule is not just for monks and nuns but for all who “have ears to hear”. The seminar focused on the possible impact of a gospel-based life, following the Rule of St Benedict, and “preferring nothing to Christ” for the church as a whole — both clergy and laity.

The Easter holidays saw much activity on Lake Bullen Merri (our grounds run down the crater slope to the water’s edge) with a regatta held on Easter Monday and boats scudding across the surface aided by a brisk wind. Conditions were perfect.

It was pleasing to see the lake being used as it was when we first came to this District in 1980.

### GARDEN NEWS

Judging by the amount of blossom on our orchard trees we should be in for a bumper harvest of fruit this summer/autumn.

In February, our Deutscher ride-on mower reached the end of its days. It has done a marvellous job for twenty-five years but was quite inadequate for the amount of lawns we have here. Its replacement is a John Deere tractor/mower and the model is better suited for the work to be done.



*Fr Bernard McGrath, Prior of Arcadia, with Fr Abbot during the community retreat*

### RETREATS

In July, Father Abbot conducted a retreat for the Sisters of the Sacred Advent in Brisbane and also took the opportunity to visit St John’s Cathedral which is in its final stages of completion. What a glorious building it is!

We spent a week in retreat under the gentle guidance of Father Bernard McGrath OSB, Prior of Arcadia Monastery, Sydney, and we thank him for his prayerful input and humour.



*The Easter regatta held on Lake Bullen Merri*

### WORLD YOUTH DAY

The community followed some of the television programming of Pope Benedict’s visit to Sydney for World Youth Day celebrations. All of those who watched or attended events will have their impressions. Three of the events that we found particularly impressive and moving were:

1. the opening Mass celebrated by Cardinal Pell,
2. the Stations of the Cross, and
3. the uplifting papal Mass on the final day.

In August Abbot Michael gave two lectures on two separate nights at the School of Prayer at Christ Church, Geelong, which were well attended. He also conducted retreats in Melbourne and Sydney.

On Sunday 31 August, the community attended a Mass of Celebration and Thanksgiving for the 90 years that the Sisters of the Good Samaritan had devoted to education and service in the nearby Coragulac parish. It was a chance to bid farewell to the sisters who are leaving, to ask God’s blessing on them, giving thanks for their work and many faceted ministries.

### FORM OF BEQUEST

I hereby bequeath to the Benedictine Abbey (Camperdown, Victoria) Inc. Regn. No. A0001714H, the sum of ..., free of all duties, to be used for its general purposes in such manner as its Committee from time to time sees fit. The receipt of the Abbot or other proper officer shall be sufficient discharge for this legacy.

# FROM BRITAIN, ON RETREAT: RECEIVING GOD'S GIFTS

by Alastair McKay

Why does someone travel 17,000 kms to come on retreat at St Mark's Abbey? Let me tell you about myself to explain.

In 1982, I came to Australia for seven months after I left school. I lived for part of my time with a Roman Catholic family in that well-known destination of Kyabram, Victoria. The O'Briens had five children, the youngest but one being a girl aged eight who was dying of a rare wasting disease, and who died while I was with the family. Their love for me, and their faith in Christ in the face of death shook my then atheism, and had a profound effect on my life. My own conversion to follow Christ two years later was undoubtedly rooted in my experience with Peter and Helen O'Brien. As a result, I had always wanted to return to Australia. However, the opportunity did not present itself until I was able to take a four-month sabbatical (long-service leave) from my job in London, England.

I work as Director of Bridge Builders at the London Mennonite Centre, having co-founded the service in 1996 and headed it up full-time since 1999. Bridge Builders' primary work is as an agency training church leaders, lay and ordained, in how to understand and handle conflict. For example, we seek to illustrate how conflict is a normal and inevitable part of life in the Christian community, something which we can learn to face and transform, and which can be an arena for discovering God's will for us and a creative force for the church's mission. We also run a network offering ongoing training and support for those who have completed one of our intensive five-day foundation courses – which includes several people in Australia and New Zealand, some of whom I will meet with during my trip. In addition, Bridge Builders offers mediation and consultancy services to churches and church-based organisations that are facing challenges with which they need outside assistance. For more information, see [www.menno.org.uk](http://www.menno.org.uk).

I have nearly completed my four weeks at the Abbey. During this time I've entered into the worship life of the community, attending all of the offices from Terce through to Compline each day, occasionally making it to Lauds, but never to Vigils! In the mornings, I've been working, mostly in the garden under Dom Placid's direction. In the afternoons I've been reading Ephesians in conjunction with an excellent commentary by a Mennonite pastor, and reading Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. I've also discovered the joys of *Lectio Divina*, following Fr Michael's prompting at the first of our weekly meetings, and have worked with the Lectionary's gospel reading most days. After Compline – by which time the flies are waning – I've gone for a long walk, often down by Lake Bullen Merri. In the evenings I've read various books suggested by Fr Michael and Sr Mary Emmanuel, such as *Father Joe* by Tony Hendra, *The Father and The Son* by Matt Murray, both biographies, and two novels by Gail Godwin, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong*, all of which I can recommend.



*Fr Abbot stayed with Alastair and his family during his recent visit to London.*

I have greatly appreciated my time at the Abbey – and I owe a huge debt to my wife Sue for taking on sole parenting of our children, aged 12 and 10, for five weeks. I identify three inter-related learnings during my time here. First is the value of stillness and quiet. All too easily so many things can distract me. Stillness promotes connection, centredness and awareness of what is around me. Second is the need to approach life with open hands in a child-like spirit, ready to receive what God has to offer. Third is the importance of being present in the moment, and attentive to how God might speak through each new person encountered – and there have been many other guests coming through during my month here. So this has been a precious time of receiving God's good gifts.

St Valentine's Day 2008

# LIBRARY AND REFECTORY READING DURING MEALS

Cataloguing library books allows one to quickly peruse some of the content matter, which can get a little out of hand, and the purpose of the exercise forgotten.

Dom Placid comments: Charles Dickens in his *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* — two minor works of the author — gives a brief account of his Italian tour in 1844, and records an even briefer visit to the great Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino. Apart from describing the long walk up the steep and lofty hill, he records hearing the Abbey bells sounding in the still air through the mist, the church so sumptuous and magnificent, the chant of the monks — and then he continues on with his journey.

Two or three years ago we had a telephone call from a friend staying at the Abbey of Maria Laach, Germany. In the background of the conversation, the Abbey bells were heard ringing out before Vespers. What a delightful sound it was!

## BOOKS READ IN THE REFECTORY

*Conferences*, John Cassian, Paulist Press, 1985

*An Italian Journey*, Ethel Mannin, Hutchinson, 1974

*What is the Point of Being a Christian*, Timothy Radcliffe OP, Burns & Oates, 2006

*Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Hope

*Benedict's Way*, LC Pratt & D Homan, Loyola Press, 2000

*Cherish Christ Above All: The Bible in the Rule of Benedict*, D Dumm OSB, Gracewing, 1996

*Mother Benedict: Foundress of the Abbey of Regina Laudis*, A Bosco, Ignatius Press, 2007.

*An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality*, M Casey OCSO, St Bede's Publications, 2005

*Crossing: Reclaiming the Landscape of our Lives*, M Barrett OSB, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2001

*Westminster Abbey*, E Carpenter, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987

*Covenant of Grace Renewed: A Vision of the Eucharist in the Seventeenth Century*, K Stevenson, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1994

*Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, R. Williams, Canterbury Press, 2007

*Thomas More*, RW Chambers, University of Michigan Press, 1965

*Listen With Your Heart: Spiritual Living with the Rule of Saint Benedict*, M. Basil Pennington OCSO, Paraclete Press, 2007



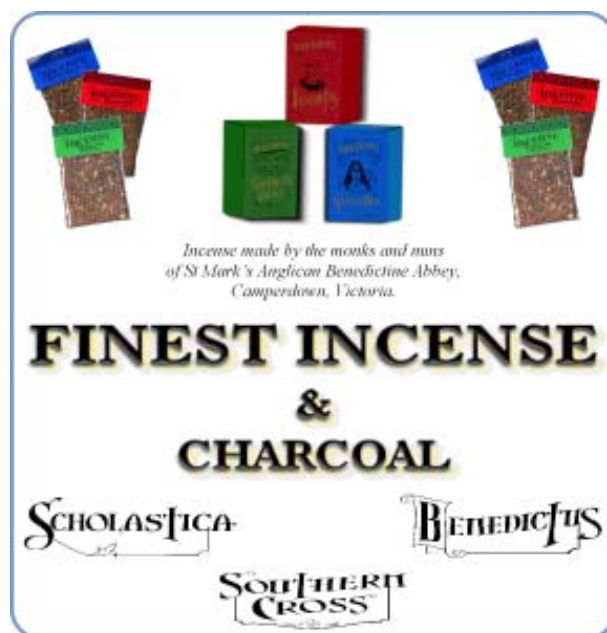
## INCENSE ORDERS AND ENQUIRIES

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500gm Boxes                      40gm Sachets

Presentation Box of 18 Sachets

Quick lighting charcoal

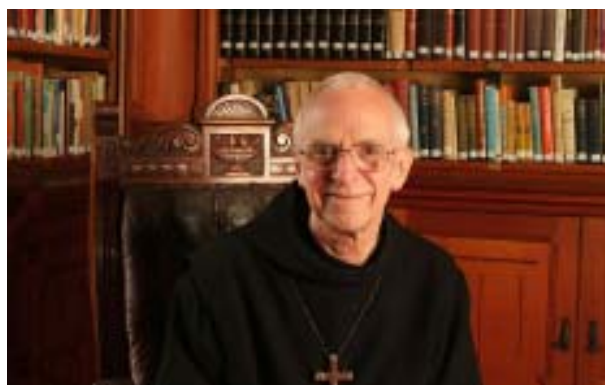


## THE RT REVD DOM PLACID SPEARRITT OSB

### ABBOT OF NEW NORCIA 29.01.97–4.10.08

It was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden and unexpected death of Abbot Placid Spearritt at Ampleforth Abbey on the 4th October.

Abbot Placid had been away from New Norcia attending the General Chapter of the Subiaco Congregation and the Abbots' Congress in Rome and was visiting the community of his Profession - Ampleforth Abbey in the UK. His community at New Norcia are much in our prayers as they come to terms with his passing and move forward under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Abbot Placid has been a good and trusted friend of our community over the years and we thank God for his insight and guidance in many and varied ways. He will be sorely missed by the New Norcia Community and the Australian Benedictine family. May he rest in peace. Amen.



*Mother Mary David Best OSB, installed as Abbess of St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, UK on 30th October 2008. Sr Raphael represented our community at the Blessing of her Abbacy.*

## NEW ABBESS AT WEST MALLING

Sr Mary David Best OSB was recently elected to succeed Mother Abbess Mary John Marshall OSB as Abbess of St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, UK.

Mother Mary John recently resigned from office after eighteen years as Abbess. She is presently taking a well-earned rest with her family in the US. We hope that she will be able to visit us some time during Advent.

### CONTACTING THE ABBEY

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## SOLEMNITY OF OUR HOLY FATHER BENEDICT

Once again we come to celebrate the Solemnity of Our Holy Father Benedict. Every year I wonder what more I can say that I've not said over the past twenty eight or thirty years.

Lo and behold by correspondence I received from the Generalate of the Subiaco Congregations some papers relating to the coming General Chapter which will be held in September at Subiaco in Italy. The preparation for that is the reading of a document called the *Charter of Charity* which has been issued by the

President and the members of his council. *A Charter of Charity*. In the *Charter of Charity*, Abbot Bruno talks about the bond of charity that exists within community and between communities. I thought that would be a good thing to focus on as we celebrate this Feast of our Holy Father Benedict — the bond of charity that exists in community and between communities.

This is a message that could be heard not just by the monastics of the world, but by the whole church. Pope Benedict gave emphasis to this in his first Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*.

One of the things that Benedict calls us to be is an icon of charity for the world. In his Rule, Benedict asks us to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. In asking that of us, he is asking us to spread that love that is within us, through the indwelling Spirit, to spread that love within our communities, within our monastic families, and also within the whole Church — to be beacons of light and love within the whole Church.

Monasticism has throughout the centuries been a beacon. It has been a sign of Christ's love in the whole Church and throughout the world. The influence and growth of Benedictine monasticism throughout the whole western world has been immense and it has fostered fraternal love within communities and within the Church in general.

When we are asked to prefer nothing to the love of Christ, we are also asked to unite ourselves with the love of Christ in order that this love will be spread abroad. We must become in our Christian and monastic lives people of charity, people of love. In the *Charter of Charity*, we are asked to remember that the bond of charity is the thing that welds and moulds community and without love there can be no community. Without love our communities become groups of disparate persons — aimless. But with love we become focussed upon Christ who is our first reference.

In the life of the monastery, everything is centred around the Work of God. We are asked also to prefer nothing to the Work of God. In the Holy Rule we are told that when the bell sounds for the Work of God everything must stop and we must hasten to perform that Work. Our commitment is to praise God faithfully, and in praising God to bring others within the ambit of God's love and God's mystery. To involve ourselves in the mystery that is God. I think that is the whole aim of our Christian life — to involve ourselves in the mystery that is God.

St Benedict urges us, time and time again, to get the priorities right. To see the Work of God as our first obligation, and to see that everything we do stems from that Work and comes back to that Work. It's a question of our receiving grace from God and of our returning thanksgiving and love. It is also about the sacrifice that we make to the Father through which the Father makes himself present to us. It is the great mystery of how God dwells within his people. Our commitment as monastics, as oblates, as Christians, is a commitment to that indwelling Spirit of God. It is a commitment that we want to share with other people. God calls us to make the bond of charity a reality, a reality within our hearts and minds.

As we are called to prefer nothing to the love of Christ and to prefer nothing to the Work of God, we are called to give ourselves completely to his service, knowing that the benefit that we receive from the gift we offer is the gift of life itself. God fills us with the abundance of his grace so that we might live fulfilled lives in this world, in this life, and that we may enjoy eternal life forever.

When Peter asks Jesus "What shall we have?", in a word, Jesus says to Peter "You will have everything. There is nothing that you will not have." When you place your trust in God there is nothing that you will not have. The abundance of God's mercy and love is there for you to enjoy forever. When we commit ourselves to Christ in love, Christ in the abundance of his love fills us to overflowing.

There is a little passage in Mark's Gospel that talks about being pressed down until it runs over. If one could imagine pushing something into a cylinder which is full of water or whatever and to see this abundance flowing over, that is what grace is like and that is what the grace of God is like in our lives. When we give ourselves to God, he gives Himself to us in abundance. We can then begin to share that abundance with those with whom we live in community, with those with whom we come into contact in the world and with those who come to us. We can show the abundance of God's love and grace.

We rejoice that Benedict has shown us a way, has led us through his Holy Rule to come to something of the experience of joy that is the joy of the knowledge of the Kingdom of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

# AUTONOMY AND BELONGING — THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE SUBIACO CONGREGATION

The General Chapter of the Subiaco Congregation of Benedictine Communities from around the world met at St Scholastica's Abbey, Subiaco, Italy, from September 9th–15th 2008.

*The monasteries of our Congregation have become fragile. There are few vocations in first world countries; it is hard to find ways of forming the Third World's vocations; everywhere, it is becoming very difficult to find superiors for each house. The principle (not explicit but nonetheless assumed) of very considerable autonomy or self-sufficiency for each monastery, no longer corresponds to the lived reality. The truth is that we must concentrate on finding ways to preserve monastic life in places where it was formerly well established, and is now in danger, and on finding ways to foster its growth in places where it is still young. The reality is that we find ourselves having to live with evolving responses to changing situations and to think of ourselves as "ongoing foundations"; we need to recognise this, in order to avoid re-maining attached, up until the last possible minute, to forms which no longer correspond to reality.*

*In fact, if it leads us to discover new opportunities for charity, this poverty can become evangelical wealth: it can lead us to see that we need each other, in order to give and to receive. Henceforth membership of the Congregation will become a condition for each monastery's realisation of its autonomy, or, if its autonomy still seems solid, to help others to acquire it. Authority itself, whether general or provincial, will take on a new face: fostering contact, setting up relationships - in short, constantly urging to mutual, tangible love.*



*Fr Abbot addressed the General Chapter and showed slides of the Abbey*

So begins the Charter of Charity, *Carta Caritas*, the main document for discussion and consideration at this year's General Chapter. Abbot President Bruno Marin, in his Presidential Address to the Chapter spoke of the Chapter as a time for promoting within our monasteries a monastic life creatively faithful to the Gospel and the Rule throughout history. Without imposing an artificial uniformity this encourages a harmonious relationship, respectful of the richness provided by the differences and yet demanding on the level of authenticity. The General Chapter is a particular time of grace for our monasteries and for each monastic. Abbot Bruno goes on to say . . . In these days I invite each of you to a wise vigilance in order not to undervalue the grace of fraternal communion that comes to us as gift from the breadth of the congregation. It is a richness to be welcomed with joy and gratitude but which asks of us a commitment not without sacrifice. The Chapter is also a time that demands a listening to the Word of the Lord through an attentive and constructive mutual listening: our hearts should remain vigilant in watching.

The General Chapter was a time of solidarity for all concerned and there were highlights that will not leave the mind. The chanting of the Divine Office and Mass in the beautiful Abbey Church of Saint Scholastica was one of these. To sing with one voice and mind, even if not in one's native tongue, was a most moving experience. During the days of the Chapter the Office and Eucharist was sung solemnly using the Gregorian Latin antiphons and various languages for the Ordinary. For instance, at Lauds and Mass each day the Latin antiphons were used and Italian was used for the psalmody and the ordinary; at Vespers the Latin antiphons were used but the rest of the Office was in a different language each evening. Italian, French, Spanish, English language was used on various evenings and the sense of unity with diversity was truly remarkable - we prayed as one family united in heart and mind. The Chapter was a time of great blessing to all. Thanks be to God.