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Subscription: \$6 for two issues

GENERAL CHAPTER

Dom Steele Hartmann joined the other Cistercian leaders at Assisi, Italy, 6-27 September for the Order's General Chapter. This was preceded by a shorter gathering of the Oriens or Asia-Pacific leaders for the purpose of finalising their Regional Report to the Chapter.



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The House Reports required from each community provide a central focus for the Chapter. This time there was some streamlining of the process for receiving, reviewing and responding to the Reports. This quite considerably cut down on the work done in the fifteen Commissions, involving, as it had, duplication. With a sigh of relief, the capitulants were able to take Sundays off, as well as a day to go to an audience with Pope Francis.

The meeting with Pope Francis was held in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican on 23 September. Francis' address to the Chapter appears on the back page of this Newsletter. He generously made himself available to meet each member individually. Yes, of course, the professional photographer was on hand to capture the handshakes. The Newsletter was grateful to be able to purchase its copy of Steele and Francis "pressing the flesh". While they were in Rome they celebrated a Mass in St Peter's, not at the main altar mind you, nor supported by the Sistine Chapel Choir. But in St Peter's nevertheless.



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Part of the Chapter's work was legislative and of no particular interest to our readership. Do we presume? Maybe the musical chairs aspect is a little more newsworthy. In our Order there is a role described as the Father Immediate, a rather awkward attempt to translate a traditional French term. The Father Immediate is the Abbot charged with a supervisory pastoral responsibility towards another community. For instance, he conducts the official Regular Visitation, presides at the election of a new Abbot, and the like. Dom Richard Purcell, as Abbot of our founding house Roscrea, had been Tarrawarra's Father Immediate till shortly before the Chapter. At that stage he was elected Abbot of Mt Melleray. Roscrea has no Abbot at the moment. The fall-out for us is that Dom Joseph Boyle of Snowmass, Colorado, has been appointed as our Father Immediate for the next three years. This means we should have him with us at some time in that period for our official Visitation. We very much look forward to that possibility. We suspect he might welcome the opportunity of a trip Down Under too! Meanwhile, we have been on our knees praying for his serious health issues.

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Steele picked up a few hats at the same time. Tarrawarra had agreed to accept responsibility for Kopua, our Kiwi neighbours “across the Ditch”. The Chapter gave him an ovation for taking on that responsibility. He was also delegated as Father Immediate to the community of Phare in Tobetsu, Hokkaido, Japan for the next three years. Already, in March 2017, with Dom Mark Schwan of Vina, California and Mother Catarina Mazzarelli of Macau, he had been part of what is known among us these days as a Commission for the Future. This group is to continue to assist Lantao in Hong Kong and the small community of Shuili in Taiwan to discern their future. All this will rack up not-a-few frequent flyer points without all that non-flying nonsense of earning points by buying wines, insurance, petrol and the like!

The Chapter also gave the green light to the preparation of a ten-part programme to be called Experientia. This programme aims to assist our communities to reflect and share on the Cistercian tradition. Fr Michael is working on it.

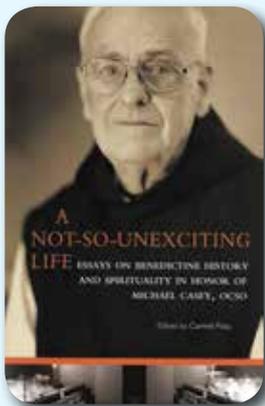


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The Abbot General and five of the “younger leaders” of the Order delivered six morning conferences to the Chapter. We are using these on the Thursdays of Lent as the basis for reflection on the Vision of the Order today. Videos of these lectures formed the basis, printed texts also being provided. This was followed by a time for personal reflection, then a communal sharing. Was it a Lenten penance? Not really. Rather, it was stimulating and enriching. ■



FR MICHAEL



Fr Michael Casey, back in 2005, wrote a book given the title **An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality.**

Now Good Samaritan Sr Carmel Posa has edited a volume of eighteen essays, released by Cistercian Publications, with the playful title, *A Not-So-Unexciting Life: Essays on Benedictine History and Spirituality in Honor of Michael Casey, OCSO.* (The American publishers, of course, have trouble spelling “honour” as with all those other “our” ending words! So sad!)

There have been two Australian launches of the book. The first was on 12 December at St Scholastica’s, the Good Samaritan Congregational Centre, at Glebe Point, Sydney. Sr Clare Condon, the retiring Good Sam Congregational leader, was the launch speaker on that occasion. Sr Jill O’Brien filled that bill at the Melbourne launch two days later at the Centre for Theology and Ministry, Parkville. Clare and Jill “did him proud”. When a ship is launched they break a bottle of champagne against its side and somehow the vessel starts to slide down the slipway. Book launches are much more sensible – the cheer squad drink the champers!

Benedictine Abbot, Jerome Kodell of Subiaco Abbey, Arkansas, US, has written: “This volume is a ringing testimony to the return to the sources of Benedictine monasticism stimulated by the renewal of Vatican II, and also of the remarkable contribution to that effort by Australia, which provides over half the authors for this collection. No one will question the expression of gratitude to Michael Casey, who has been at the heart of this movement both worldwide and locally. With these essays readers will be able to catch up on research of recent years and also to share the excitement of new investigations. The book is clear evidence that the renewal in Benedictine studies is far from over”. ■

BR MARK



We were pleased to welcome Mark O’Sullivan as a postulant at the end of February 2017. Then on All Saints’ Day Dom Steele clothed him in the habit of a Cistercian novice. Br Mark came to us from Canberra. If he had aspired to being a politician, he may have run

the risk of becoming another football in the dual citizenship saga/soapie in our national capital as he was born in Christchurch, New Zealand. However, Cistercians don’t make a fuss about such things! Mark received his basic education in New Zealand and went on to a number of tertiary level degrees and diplomas in Melbourne at TAFE and La Trobe University. He worked for the Australian Public Service before joining our community. Welcome, Mark. Our prayers are with you as you undertake your initial formation as a monk. ■

FR CARTHAGE

Fr Carthage O’Dea gave us occasion to celebrate not one but two milestones with him in the spring of last year.

In mid-October he renewed his vows during the community Mass on the seventieth anniversary of his profession as a monk. That’s a lot of water under the bridge in the Lord’s service, and a lot of psalms ascending above. The journey, of course, began at Mt St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea in Tipperary. Sixty-three of those seventy years have been spent helping, as one of the founders of Tarrawarra, to establish Cistercian life in Australia. Three weeks after this celebration Carthage turned ninety and we were in party mode again. Ad multos annos, Carthage! ■



KITCHEN

Our kitchen underwent a total overhaul between 1 May and 6 September last year. It was old and tired after serving the Big House of former families, and then the monks, for over a century. It had been tinkered with on other occasions. This time the treatment was radical.

Community meetings dealt with burning issues such as: Do we relocate the kitchen or renew on the present site? (The latter won out, as it was more convenient in serving both the community and the guesthouse). If the latter, where will the cook operate out of in the interim? (Barbara, the regular weekday cook, and Charmaine, her dependable stand-in, made do, at a squeeze, with the kitchenette in our dining room). And then there was the "Save the Chimney Campaign". (Successful! The other five chimneys on the roof would have been architecturally bereft without it).

Tony Snell, our maintenance chief, picked up the ball and ran with it from there – redesign, materials and new furnishings, steady flow of tradies in logical and uninterrupted order, and a lot of the hands-on work himself, assisted by his side-kick, Doug Nott.

Due to the need to re-stump the area, most equipment needed to be removed. The cool-room was demolished, judged inefficient. (Br Gabriel Curtis, decades ago, seated his heat-distressed mate Joe Walsh, visiting from Dublin, in there to cool him down on one of Melbourne's scorchers.



There won't be the possibility for that in the new freezers!). The guests' scullery was absorbed into the renewed kitchen as storage and cook's office. Fair exchange, no robbery, the cool-room area has become the guests' scullery and launderette (no coins required).

Stainless steel sinks, benches, fridges, stoves have proliferated. Without a doubt the star attraction is the combi-oven. An on-site seminar was held for those likely to be using it. You have to acquire a licence before you risk pressing buttons. Br Bernard produces boiled eggs without ever putting them in water to boil! (How ridiculous! What is the world coming to!). The cooks will no longer get exercise heading off to collect ingredients from the distant storeroom, and they will now be comfortable in both Melbourne's cold and heat.

We offer a big vote of thanks to Tony and all who contributed to the success of the project. ■

GUESTS AND VISITORS

Our guesthouse was closed for a period in the middle of 2017 during the work on the kitchen.

Although our accommodation is limited to six, the absence of guests did leave a sense of the temporary loss of a valued dimension to our life. However, we did continue to be encouraged by the ongoing presence of those who come during the day to attend our celebrations of Lauds-Mass at 6.00 am and Vespers at 6.00 pm. Yes, we are inspired by the earnest faith of those prayerful friends. We monks have only a short journey to the church along our covered-way, even if behind a wheely-walker. But those who join us have to organise themselves, in a variety of seasonal light and weather, to drive here and up our dusty front



avenue. They come from here and there around the district: Healesville, Chum Creek, Toolangi, Kinglake, Coldstream, and even more distant Rowville. ■

FR DAVID

Fr David was delighted with all those 80 signs displayed on the Yarra Valley roadsides when he entered his next decade in October!

His mother would have reminded him that, at that age, he was "a mere child". Nevertheless, eighteen of his family and friends from "way back" (which is to be read as "mainly from his Queensland past") thought it significant enough to jet in as a cheer squad. The community got their kicks out of the scene of him trying valiantly, and then desperately, to blow out the candles on the cake. They just kept re-igniting! Ha! Ha! Well, he had enough breath to extinguish them at least momentarily. If technology wants to be mean, see if he cares! ■



CEMETERY

In keeping with the custom of our Order, Tarrawarra has its own monastic cemetery. Government permission, coincidentally, was obtained for it not long before the first death in the community in early 1958. Since then twenty of the community have found burial there. Recently our friend Henry Verhoeven from Dixons Creek recognised that the entrance had seen better days and he offered to replace the collapsing wooden fence. We are grateful to Henry for the fine job he has done. ■



GOOD SAMARITAN SISTERS

The Good Samaritan Sisters, a vital and dynamic element of the Australian and New Zealand Benedictine Union (ANZBU), held their 26th Chapter Gathering from September 24 to October 2 last in Sydney.



The 115 Sisters present produced a new Statement of Directions, the fruit of a 15-month period of dialogue and discernment, and elected a leadership team for the coming six years. Sister Clare Condon had led the Sisters with distinction over the past twelve years, and contributed on many fronts to the life of the Australian Church. Her second six-year term has ended, and Sister Patty Fawkner was elected as the new Congregational Leader. Sisters Catherine McCahill, Meg Kahler, Marella Rebgetz and Veronica McCluskie are the four Councillors chosen to assist Patty in the pastoral governance of the Congregation.

We here at Tarrawarra, as fellow members of ANZBU, rejoice with the Good Sams as they set forth anew with their usual impressive energy, vision and generosity.

Patty's pot biography reads: "Sister Patty Fawkner is an adult educator, writer and facilitator with formal tertiary qualifications in arts, education, theology and spirituality. Born and raised in Sydney, Patty was professed in 1973 and has lived and ministered in New South Wales and Victoria. She began her ministry with the congregation as a primary school teacher, before taking on school principal roles. From 2002 to 2005 Patty was Director of Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre. She has collaborated with many groups in the Australian Church, including the Council for Australian Catholic Women and Catholic Religious Australia. Patty has served twice as a council member of her congregation's leadership team".

We look forward to continuing the fruitful relationship in matters touching our common roots in the Rule of St Benedict. ■

BIRRARUNG

The Yarra River is Tarrawarra's most extensive boundary. But unless our guests stretch their legs across our river flats, they can go away without even being aware of its quiet and hidden presence.



There is a sense in which you might say the Yarra possesses humility. (For the information of our less athletic guests, the thousands of trees snaking across the landscape in the distance, marks the Yarra's course. They are indigenous to the locality but were planted in recent decades by ourselves and supportive tree groups).

The Yarra is definitely no Amazon, Nile, or Mississippi; not even Australia's Murray-Darling. It cannot boast any impressive length, width, or depth. From its source on the flanks of Mt Baw Baw in the southern Great Dividing Range to its entry into Port Phillip at Hobson's Bay it measures a modest 242km (150 miles). In its upper reaches, near Warburton, it is crystal clear and makes its own music as it dances over the rocks. By the time it reaches us, the streambed has become increasingly silty, its clarity has gone, and its brown appearance has earned it the reputation of flowing upside down. A painting by Fred Williams entitled "The Yarra, Studley Park, 1974", was accompanied, at a recent exhibition of his paintings at our neighbouring TarraWarra Museum of Art, by a note, which spoke of "the calm surface of the tan river". That is how it is at Tarrawarra. To anyone who sits quietly on its banks it yields up a wealth of lovely reflections of earth and sky. Just occasionally there is the added thrill of the sighting of a platypus to make one's day.

Prior to the monks' arrival in 1954 levy banks had been erected to mitigate flooding on this property

and the one above it. At that time they were one. In wet years we still experience inundation of the river flats when the waters of Long Gully drain, which runs the entire length of the property, can't enter the Yarra because the river itself is up and forcing the levy bank floodgates closed. We have improved the drainage so that the water gets away quickly once the river falls and the gates open. We in the Yarra Valley, and Melbourne itself, are protected, against the worst the Yarra could hand out, by the Maroondah Dam across the Watts River, a tributary just above Healesville, opened in 1927, and by the Upper Yarra Reservoir above Warburton, opened in 1957. Both also supply water for Melbourne. The Maroondah has an uncontrolled spillway, so there's no stopping it in very wet years.

Indigenous people occupied the area for at least 30,000 years. For them the Yarra was an important source of food, and a place for meetings and corroborees. They knew it, in the Woi-wurrung language, as Birrarung.

On 21 September last the Victorian Parliament passed the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017. In a first for Victorian state laws, it includes Woi-wurrung, (the language of the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners), in both the Act's title and in its preamble. The phrase "Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn" means "keep the Yarra alive". Six Wurundjeri elders gave speeches in Parliament in both English and Woi-wurrung to explain the significance of the river and this Act to their people.

The Act gives an independent voice to the river by way of the Birrarung Council, a statutory advisory body which must include at least two traditional owners, and no government representatives. The Act provides for the development of a strategic plan for the river's management and protection. This includes a long-term community vision, developed through a process of active community participation that will identify areas for protection. The strategic plan will also be informed by environmental, social, cultural, recreational and management principles. The protection principles highlight Aboriginal cultural values, heritage and knowledge, and the importance of involving traditional owners in policy planning and decision-making. "Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn!" ■

ADDRESS TO THE 2017 GENERAL CHAPTER OF CISTERCIAN ABBOTS AND ABBESSES BY POPE FRANCIS continued from p8

the moments not as the end, but as a means of progressing in the personal relationship with God. In this way you become teachers and witnesses who offer Him the sacrifice of praise and intercede for the necessities and the salvation of the people. And at the same time your monasteries continue to be privileged places where you can find true peace and genuine happiness that only God, our safe refuge, can give.

From the very beginning, the Cistercians of the Strict Observance have been characterised by a great sobriety of life, in their conviction that it was a valid help in concentrating on the essential and in reaching more easily the joy of the spousal encounter with Christ. This element of spiritual and existential simplicity preserves all its worth as testimony in today's cultural context, which too often leads to the desire for ephemeral goods and illusory artificial paradises.

This lifestyle also favours your interior and exterior relationships with the monastery. You do not live like hermits in a community, but as cenobites in a unique desert. God manifests himself in your personal solitude, as well as in the solidarity that joins the members of the community. You are alone and separated from the world to advance on the path of divine intimacy; at the same time, you are called to make known and to share this spiritual experience with other brothers and sisters in a constant balance between personal contemplation, union with the liturgy of the Church, and welcome to those who seek moments of silence so as to be introduced into the experience of living with God. Your Order, like every religious institute, is a gift made by God to the Church; therefore, it is necessary that he lives well inserted into the communal dimension of the Church itself. I encourage you to be a qualified witness of the search for God, a school of prayer, and a school of charity for all.

The "Charter of Charity", a document that sets out the ways of your vocation duly authenticated by the Church, establishes the essential features of the General Chapter, called to be a sign of unity in charity for the whole Institute. This unity in charity is the paradigm of every religious family

called upon to follow Christ more closely in the dimension of community life, and is expressed first in your individual monastic communities in a climate of true and cordial fraternity, according to the words of the Psalm: 'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!' (133,1). In this regard, the invitation of St Benedict is always present: 'No one is disturbed or saddened in the house of God'.

Unity in charity is also expressed in fidelity to spiritual heritage, that is, to the identity of your Order. In this regard, the General Chapter is a propitious occasion for renewing, in a climate of dialogue and mutual listening, the communion of intent in seeking the will of God. I urge you to question yourselves with sincerity and truth about the quality of your testimony of life, dynamic fidelity to the charism, on how it has been lived by your monastic communities, as well as by single monks and nuns. The safeguarding of the charism is indeed one of the main responsibilities of the General Chapter and it is a vital experience of the present, situated between grateful memory of the past and the prospects for a future of hope.

Your Order, in the events of its history, has known times of grace and moments of difficulty; however, it has always persevered in faith in following Christ, with the objective of the glory of God and the good of the people. Following in the wake of your spiritual tradition, you are able to read the current state of the Order in its moments of light and darkness, and in the newness of the Spirit, identify with courage new possibilities and opportunities to bear witness to your charism in the Church and in society today.

I hope that this witness will be made even more eloquent by an increasingly organic coordination between the various branches of the Order.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, model of every consecrated life, accompany the works of your Chapter and the path of the Order with her maternal intercession. With such vows, as I ask you to pray for me, I impart to you my apostolic blessing, which I extend to all the monks and nuns of your communities.

Thank you.

ADDRESS TO THE 2017 GENERAL CHAPTER OF CISTERCIAN ABBOTS AND ABBESSES BY POPE FRANCIS



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of your General Chapter. I thank each one of you for this visit, starting with the Abbot General who has acted as interpreter for all of you, also illustrating the purpose and objectives of your assembly. Through you I would like to send a cordial greeting to the brothers and sisters of your monasteries throughout various countries. I go with my heart and mind to your silent cloisters, from which the prayer for the Church and for the world continues ceaselessly. And I thank the Lord for the irreplaceable presence of the monastic communities, which represent a spiritual richness and a constant call to seek first of all “the things up above”, so as to live earthly realities to the right extent.

In these days of reflection and exchange of experiences, you are called upon to identify goals and paths to live with greater authenticity

your vocation and your consecration, taking into account the needs of the present moment, so as to be witnesses of assiduous prayer, of sobriety, of unity in charity.

Your contemplative life is characterised by assiduous prayer, an expression of your love for God and reflection of a love that embraces all humanity. Following the example of St Benedict, you do not place anything before the *Opus Dei*. I urge you to give great importance to meditation on the Word of God, especially the *lectio divina*, which is a source of prayer and a school of contemplation. To be contemplative requires a faithful and persevering journey, to become men and women of prayer, ever more pervaded by love for the Lord and transformed into his friends. They are not “professionals” – in a negative sense – but lovers of prayer, considering fidelity external to the practices and norms that regulate it and mark