

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BENEDICTINE EDUCATION
(30th October to 2nd November 2005)
A report by Abbot Christopher Jamison, President, ICBE

The theme was 'Globalisation and Education: a Benedictine Response' and the conference itself was a Benedictine response to globalisation. 125 educators from 62 schools in 17 countries met at St Mary's Abbey Delbarton in New Jersey, the largest ever international gathering of Benedictine educators. The amount of international activity since the previous conference at Sao Paulo in 2002 was also testimony to a growing awareness among Benedictine schools of the need to act globally. The Conference began by receiving reports on these global activities.

INTERNATIONAL BENEDICTINE YOUTH CONGRESS (IBYC)

First among these were the International Benedictine Youth Congresses held at Woodside Priory, California in 2004 and at Meschede, Germany in 2005. The Meschede congress was held the week before World Youth Day and, although this created some administrative problems, it greatly increased the numbers attending. After discussion, the Conference decided to maintain the link to World Youth Day and the Benedictine Sisters of the Good Samaritan offered to host IBYC 2008 in Sydney. Hubert Hering, from Münsterschwarzach and organiser of the First IBYC, has been appointed to the Commission with special responsibility for IBYC.

THE ICBE AND BENET

There has been some confusion about the meaning of ICBE and the Conference was presented with a new structure. In order to clarify the situation and to extend the scope of our work, the following new structure has been put in place. The initials ICBE now refer only to the International Commission on Benedictine Education which reports to the Abbot Primate. The ICBE oversees two kinds of activity:

- for students through IBYC as already described
- for Benedictine educators through international meetings.

This second area will now be called the Benedictine Educators Network, BENET. This network will be developed by three lines of action:

1. international conferences, to be called BENET followed by the year, hence this conference immediately became BENET 2005;
2. a new web site for Benedictine teachers www.b-e-net.org (the old web site will continue to carry the data base and information about the Commission);
3. regional meetings

There was a spontaneous movement during the Conference to organise regional networks and meetings of BENET in Asia, USA, UK, Central Europe, and Africa.

THE BENEDICTINE RESPONSE TO GLOBALISATION

Three presentations to the Conference addressed this issue. Sr Mary Collins OSB outlined the key features of globalisation and described 10 features of Benedictine living with which to meet it. She encouraged us to add to the list from our lived experience. Fr Martin Neyt OSB, as President of AIM, outlined ways for AIM and ICBE to work together by connecting Benedictine schools across the North/South global divide. Lute Eguiguren and others described the Benedictine Teachers Retreat

which has been devised by an international group (The Cunaco Group) and used in Brazil, Chile, UK and USA.

WORKSHOPS

Participants reported favourably on the workshops which covered the following:

School worship	Working with Parents
Lectio for Students	Assessing Benedictine Identity
Systems of Governance	Exchange programmes
Ecology & Schools	Campus Ministry
Inter-religious Dialogue in Schools	Developing b-e-net.org
Incomplete Families: an African Perspective	Women in Benedictine Schools

DEANERIES

As well as workshops, participants took part in deanery (group) discussions and from these emerged some features of Benedictine schools which were then presented to the whole Conference. Most striking of these was a presentation by Dom Robson Alves of Colegio Sao Joao Gualberto of Sao Paulo who described how his community had nearly abandoned their school until he attended the Second International Conference in Sao Paulo and learnt of the many creative ways in which Benedictine communities were developing their schools in the service of the Gospel. He and his community have now reasserted their leadership in the school in order to affirm that it is a school of the Lord's service. This story seemed to vindicate the work of the Conference.

SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

- Fr Jean Marie Christiaens (Zevenkerken) and Fr Martin Neyt have agreed to arrange a workshop in Belgium in October '06 to help school partnerships.
- AIM and ICBE will continue to explore ways of working together.
- Head teachers will show solidarity with their colleagues in poor schools by paying for their attendance at BENET 2007 in Santiago de Chile.
- www.b-e-net.org is already active
- Regional meetings are being organised in several regions.

MEMBERSHIP OF ICBE

At the end of the Conference, I invited the following to join the Commission:

- Sr. Mary McDonald, Good Samaritan Sister, to represent Australia. She is on their General Council, nominated by the Prioress General to work with ICBE.
- Sr Placida Awuor, Tutzing Sister, to represent Africa. She is Headmistress of a new school in the slums of Nairobi.

To complete the membership of the Commission as planned, we need a representative from the Philippines and from the Cistercians.

OVERALL

The Conference was greatly enhanced by the fantastic organisation and hospitality of Fr Elias Lorenzo and the community at Delbarton. The Commission worked hard to enable poor schools to participate and the success of this was seen in the presence of ten people from Africa as well as poor schools in Brazil and Sri Lanka. Half the schools were new to the Conference and two thirds of the participants were attending for the first time. Even with so many new people, the whole project took many steps forward, indicating that it has come of age since its small beginnings in 1997.