

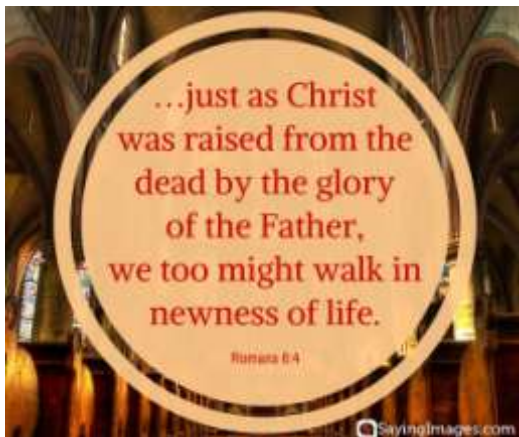


PUNALUR NEWSLETTER

Issue No.1

January – April 2019

PAX!



A Blessed and Grace-filled Easter to all!

The beginning

It was a dream but we never thought that we will come out with one. It happened at last! Thanks be to God and to our dear sisters for their contributions. Here we are with our “maiden issue”. There is nothing extraordinary in it. We just want to share with you how life goes on in our “Shanti Nivas” on top of the Benedictine Hill.

It is indeed a great joy for us to come to you through this Newsletter. It coincides with the launching of a yearlong preparation for the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Missionary Benedictine presence on Roman soil.

I could only look back with immense joy and profound gratitude at the seven years and eight months that I spent at the Generalate House. Through our Superiors, formators and all the Sisters who were residing at the Casa at that time, we, formandeas received a good religious formation. With the “older” Sisters giving us good examples, we grew up in our Missionary Benedictine spirit. It was a challenge but I survived and I learned from the “interculturality” that we were already living at that time.

We praise and thank the Lord for this great event in our Congregation.



Sr. Maria Gratia Balagot, OSB.

Our Farm, a blessing



I joined the Punalur community when Rajkot was closed on 2016 putting an end to one chapter and starting another in my Missionary Benedictine life. The Lord was so good, he gifted me with a mini-Sabbatical which I spent with our Sisters at Norfolk Priory. On my return to Punalur, the small farm caught my attention which is most likely to happen as I grew up in the farm. I did not hesitate the offer of looking after it. It is a little portion of the seven acres where our Monastery and School stand surrounded by more than a thousand rubber trees. Though it looks so small, it is big enough to make a space to a variety of fruit trees like guava, mango, rambutan, santol, chico, makopa, some 20 coconut trees and bananas of different kinds. Going a bit further, I found a clear spot where root crops such as cassava, ginger, turmeric and vegetables could thrive.

I left the place full of hope that something could be done. On the way to my right I passed by the cow shed where two female cows are kept and will be delivering their calves in a few weeks. To the left there is a space big enough to build a poultry house.

It needed much time, money and effort but today, three years after my first survey of the farm, it never failed to supply us with fruits, vegetables, root crops and other things. A good part of it goes to our kitchen and the rest to the market. We have to sell cows for lack of space to keep them but we always retain two females to give us young ones and to supply us with milk. Like the other products, some of it are sold.

Our first experiment with the poultry house was a failure. We gave ourselves a second chance and now, with 90 chickens that lay eggs every two days, we gather around 70 eggs everyday. Aside from having a good supply, our meagre income also increased a bit.

Aware of our dependence on foreign donations, we try our best to make use of what we have and to find ways and means of having an income. For this, ***our small farm is a blessing***. The Lord made sure that it is there for us to discover and to develop when He led us to this place twenty three years ago.

Sr. Leoni Manimala, OSB.

Fraternal Visit

Fr. John Kaippally, OSB., the Prior of the Missionaries of St. Ottilien in Kumily always insinuated his desire to visit our community. The chance came when Fr. Maurus, OSB. of St. Ottilien was with them in their community for some days. They dropped by at our House on their way to other commitments. Though they stayed just for a night, their presence among us was edifying. They are our Benedictine brothers. We prayed together. We were able to exchange news with them, gave Fr. Maurus a tour around the compound and most of all, a beautiful Eucharistic celebration the following day before they left, in which Fr. Maurus gave a challenging homily on suffering. May the Lord bless and reward them for their gracious visit.

By Sr. Anitta Lawrence, OSB.

Intensification Course

We started our Intensification Course on November, 2018 in a very solemn way with our Junior Mistress encouraging us to take this period in our life seriously.

As far as we can remember it is the first time in the history of Punalur community to conduct an Intensification Course in this manner. We, Sr. Kripa Maria, Sr. Anitta, Sr. Lydia and Sr. Fausina are privileged to have experts on different topics to help us in our preparation for Final Vows. Human Development, Christology, Missiology, etc., help us to grow deeper in our faith, in our commitment to our Missionary Benedictine life and prepares us in our mission to respond to the needs of the Church. It also brings us into a better relationship with each other and with God. We have much time for private prayer, personal reflections and study.

Most striking is the effort of our Bishop, Most. Rev. Selvester Ponnuthan to spend time with us, bringing to us the Word of God through lessons on Sacred Scripture and Lectio Divina whenever possible. On such occasions we receive individual blessings from him. Our good Bishop was the one who presided during our First Profession of Vows which took place right after his Episcopal Ordination and appointment as the third Bishop of our Diocese.



We are very grateful to our community for their prayers and support and for providing everything that we need in our spiritual journey. We also ask you dear sisters to pray for us.

Sr. Kripa Ma. Babu, OSB., Sr. Anitta Lawrence, OSB., Sr. Lydia Jacob, OSB. & Sr. Fausina Varghese, OSB.

School News

I had nightmares as the beginning of School Year 2018-19 was approaching. Although I had been working as a fulltime teacher at our St. Benedict English Medium School (SBEMS) for eight years, I was never involved in administrative work. Out of obedience I accepted the post as the Principal when it was proposed to me aware that in our small community nobody could do it. My faith in God's abiding grace, the appointment of Sr. Leoni Manimala, OSB as my co-worker and the support of our Superior and our sisters encouraged me to push through.

Aside from administrative work, there was also the continuous struggle to comply with Government Regulations on Education. With God's grace and the help of good Government and Private School officials, we were able to produce all the necessary requirements leading to positive results and better implementation of our programme.

In spite of my inexperience, school activities went on smoothly with the help of Sr. Leoni, the teachers and employees, parents, children and our community. Guest Speakers were invited to improve the skills of our teachers and on some occasions, parents also attended.

For the first time, our school participated in a competition on Cultural and Educational Presentations organized by the All Kerala Private Schools Association (AKPSA) which was held for two days two hours distance from our place. To the joy of our teachers, parents, children and our community, our school



won prizes in cash, trophies, medals and certificates in five categories namely: Group dancing, Story telling and Recitation (English & Malayalam), Declamation and Handwriting. With this good result of our participation, everybody is enthusiastic to repeat the experience.



The Annual Day celebration was graced with the presence of Mr. Mohan, the Secretary of AKPSA who inspired the audience with his charismatic way of delivering his message.

The final exams brought the school year to an end. The experience though with all its ups and downs only made me more courageous to face another year of service ... and all because I believe that the Lord is with us.

Sr. Rimolda Flory, OSB.

Mission Work at Haus St. Benedikt, Tutzing

"Your Word is a light for my feet, ever shining on my way". (Ps 119:105)



March 4, 2015. This is an unforgettable day in my life. On this day I arrived in Munich, Germany. The plane landed on time and after passing through passport control and other formalities, I found Sr. Venantia and Sr. Amabilis waiting for me. There was snow and it was foggy everywhere. It was very cold. When we arrived at Haus St. Benedikt I received a very warm welcome from the Superior, Sr. Chantal, Sr. Alfrida and all the Sisters. They were all very friendly.

Like new beginners, I found many difficulties; the culture, the language, people, food, and the weather were all new to me. However, I found a good help in Sr. Chantal who was always there to encourage and support me.

Eventually I was sent for German language studies. At last I was able to communicate with everybody. Despite all the initial difficulties I was able to adapt with the changes and started with my work as a nurse in the community. The seriously ill and bed-ridden sisters inspired me. I felt accepted and I enjoyed working among them. I had wonderful experiences of various kinds and I learned a lot.

I thank Mother Angela Strobel, OSB who gave me a chance to do this mission work, the former superior, Sr. Chantal Gerster, OSB., the actual superior Sr. Martha Baumeister, OSB and all the Sisters and Oblates for all the kindness and help that I received during my stay with them. May the Lord bless and reward you all.

Four years passed by so quickly, now I'm back to my beloved Kerala. Shanti Nivas is a home for me. Sr. Maria Gratia and all the sisters were very happy to see me again. They were so eager to hear about my experiences. It is very easy for me to share because that was my life for the last four years and I really enjoyed it.

My family too was waiting anxiously for my visit. During my stay in Germany my younger sister got married and now has a two year old cute boy, the joy of both families, ours and her in-laws. I thank the

Lord for my homecoming. I am very happy and I enjoy staying with my family and my sisters at Shanti Nivas but I also miss my sisters at Haus St. Benedikt. I am going back to them for another four years.

I hope to see you all soon in good health!

Sr. Josia Joy, OSB.

International Novitiate Experiences and Memories

“Man / woman is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry my Name before the Gentiles, Kings and Israelites” (Acts 9:15)



Little did I know that to become a religious one has to undergo a thorough religious formation. I was alone in formation from Aspirancy up to Novitiate. I did not have any formal training until I became a Postulant since there was no formator in the community at the time when I entered. But for me, everything was normal, I was just following whatever the community did in their daily life of prayer and work. I was so convinced that the Lord called me that I enjoyed my life with the community without taking note of the

passing of time. I spent two years as an aspirant and more than one year as Postulant. Even the plan of spending my Novitiate in another country with Novices from other Priors did not frighten me.

I arrived in Windhoek on March 14, 2016. It was an adventure as that was my first time to get out of India and I was travelling alone. I sensed that my Novice Mistress was more nervous than I when we parted at the airport. I could not even remember how many hours was the flight. I only know that I changed flight two times and finally arrived in Windhoek still alive at 9:00 p.m. I was welcomed warmly by the community and was led to the chapel for a thanksgiving prayer.

During the days that followed, I became aware of the difference of culture, language, customs, etc. I had nobody to talk in my own language so I was forced to speak in English (*the Indian way*). Instead of the white saree that I use in Punalur I was given a uniform of the Novices in Windhoek. Celebrations especially Liturgical is the same but different in style. There was much dancing and singing. I still remember the homily of the Bishop during the first Chrism Mass that I attended. The Bishop emphasized that “mission is for everybody and it should be active and participative. We do not do it alone”. In our Missionary Benedictine way too, we do everything together. That is how we build our community.

I got a lot of inspiration and support from the Prioress, my formators and the Sisters in the Windhoek Priory. It was my first time to live in a big community. It gave me a chance to learn and to understand our Missionary Benedictine Life. The Novitiate Programme was well planned and we had very good Novice Mistress and teachers. Aside from the many lessons that I received I became more fluent in English. After my Profession of Vows I still stayed for some months. I was sent for exposure to one of the communities. That was my first experience to live in a small community as a professed sister. Later on, when I was already out of this community I realized my mistakes. I still have a lot to learn.

I came back to Punalur on January 15, 2019. All the sisters and candidates gave me a hearty welcome. When I was already alone in my room I felt the difference. I am no longer the young Novice who left almost three years ago. I am now a professed sister. Even with my family I felt the same. My father was very happy to see me. At last he accepted my decision to follow the Lord.

I thank the Lord for all these good things that happened in my life. I thank especially the Windhoek Priory, Mother Mary Thomas Prado, OSB., the Prioress, my formators, Sr. Raphaela Mlwilo, OSB., Sr. Abraham Kang, OSB., all the sister and my companions in formation. I will never forget the many good things that I learned and experienced in your midst.

Having been formed in another Priory and exposed to other cultures, I feel prepared to go for mission work if it is the Lord's will for me.

Sr. Maria Johanna, OSB.

A Timely and Precious Visit

It was like *"the rain that falls after the drought"*. We could hardly believe when our superior announced that our new Prioress General Mother Maoro Sye, OSB. and our Vicarress, Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB. are coming to visit us. We needed some recharging after having exerted much effort to overcome some difficulties lately. Finally, we see light at the end of the tunnel.

Sr. Maria Gratia and Sr. Leoni welcomed them at the airport on March 29, 2019. They were received at our door with the traditional Indian rite for receiving guests after which we ushered them to the Chapel for thanksgiving prayer.

It was just a friendly visit. As such there were not much formalities and activities. A courtesy call to Bishop Selvester Ponnumuthan, tree planting, and a community outing were the main events. In their own simple but affective and effective way, Mother Maoro and Sr. Lumen addressed the different concerns of the community through interviews and sessions with the sisters.

The community tried to safeguard the well-being of our guests because they came at a time when the climate was at it's worst, there was scarcity of water and we were continuously bothered by the bugs and bees. We have five beehives hanging at our roof and the wind, especially when we are at the chapel, brings along with it bugs from the rubber trees. They don't bite but crawl everywhere and we (human beings) are their favourites. There were also mosquitoes in abundance and we suspected that Sr. Lumen was attacked as she got ill on the third day after their arrival. To our relief they both accepted these inconveniences gracefully.

Before we know it, we were already saying *"Tante Grazie"* and *"Arrivederci"*. We thank the Lord who plans everything, and we thank Mother Maoro and Sr. Lumen for coming to visit us. Though it was



short, it was timely, precious and a loving visit. As one of the sisters answered when the question about the reason of the visit was brought out: *"Because you love us"*. ***And we love you too!***

Sr. Benedicta Kavalippadan, OSB.



Friendly Visit to Punalur



March 29 – April 4, 2019



Mother Maoro Sye, OSB. & Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB.



Thank you!

Come again!