

BENET 2007

Hermanos y hermanas bienvenidos a Benet 2007, la cuarta conferencia internacional sobre la educación Benedictina. En primer lugar, quiero expresar la gratitud de todos los presentes por la acogida tan atenta y tan calurosa que nos ha ofrecido el Movimiento Apostólico Manquehue. Y que maravilla la transformación del gimnasio en una iglesia, se diría una basílica. A José Manuel y a todos los miembros del equipo BENET, puedo asegurarles que todo su trabajo ha creado un ambiente muy especial para nuestra conferencia y estamos muy agradecidos. Muchísimas gracias.

And thank you to all of you who have come such distances to be here. We are over 160 participants from 23 countries, the largest meeting of educators in Benedictine schools ever held. I want to say a special word of appreciation to all those who have not attended a BENET conference before, so please could all those here for the first time stand up so we can welcome you especially. In total in the world there are 134,000 pupils in 200 Benedictine and Cistercian schools. The International Commission on Benedictine Education represents them. So let me introduce the members of the Commission to you now. (**Introductions**).

The Commission has three aims agreed with the Abbot Primate. Let me explain these goals and how we have been working to achieve them since our last conference.

1. Our first aim is to create an international network of Benedictine Schools: we had 120 people from 17 countries in our last conference at Delbarton in the USA and we have over 160 from 23 countries here in Santiago. So the network is growing significantly with an increase of 40 people and 6 countries, the 6 new countries being Argentina, Colombia, Congo, Guatemala, Spain and Uganda. We have in particular worked hard to strengthen links with Benedictine schools in the Philippines, where there are 40,000 students in our schools, making it the country with the largest number of Benedictine pupils in the world. I am delighted to see that the Head of every Benedictine

- school in the Philippines is present here today; thank you for your special contribution to building our international network. And looking forwards, our network will we hope grow again with the Fourth International Benedictine Youth Congress in Sydney next year hosted by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan; Sr Mary will be introducing this event to us all later this afternoon.
2. Our second aim is to foster the expression of Benedictine education within different cultures. Since our last international conference, there have been various regional meetings, the largest being a meeting of 70 German speaking teachers in Benedictine and Cistercian schools held at St Ottilien in Bavaria. In addition, the work of building connections among African schools has made small but significant steps and the presence of a growing number of African schools in our conference is a great sign of hope that this will develop further. For the first time we have a representative of the Benedictine communities of French speaking Africa and it is a pleasure to welcome Father Richard, the Prior of Kinshasa; mon pere, nous sommes tres contents que vous etes ici.
 3. Our third and final aim is to develop the Benedictine vision of education; the Key Note Addresses and the workshops at all our conferences have over the years advanced this vision in important ways. At our last conference in Delbarton, our theme was globalisation and we had a Key Note Speech by Father Martin Neyt, the President of the Alliance for International Monasticism, AIM. As a result, we have been learning from AIM how to create global partnerships and later this afternoon you will be hearing about some of the first steps towards this from Fr Elias. Looking back over 8 years of working together on the vision of Benedictine vision of education, perhaps the most striking outcome has been the growth of *lectio divina* as the trademark or hall mark of a Benedictine school.

Turning then to our present conference, our theme is 'To Teach As Benedict Did.' Put simply, over these days we will be asking two fundamental questions: firstly, what did teaching mean when Benedict wrote his Rule? It

certainly did not mean teaching to pass exams but what it did mean was teaching wisdom. And that leads into the second key question: how do we teach wisdom to young people today? How do we teach it to our educators and to our parents? What better questions could there be for Benedictine educators to consider. What a wonderful gift from God to have been given these days to pray together and to speak together as we address these questions. St Benedict invites his followers ‘to delight in virtue.’ In the global culture of consumer values, virtue is rarely referred to; instead all are encouraged to pursue happiness. Can Christians accept the happiness principle that drives the global economy? How is teaching virtue different from teaching happiness? Our responses to these questions really do matter for the hundreds of thousands of pupils in our global network of schools.

We are blessed to be led in our response to these questions with key note addresses from Fr Columba Stewart and from Cristobal Valdes, together with contributions and workshops by a wide variety of Benedictine educators. As we have already seen in the opening presentations, it is also a very special blessing to be meeting as the guests of the Manquehue Apostolic Movement and in the context of their schools. Here are Benedictine schools that have never had a monk or a sister running them and yet capture the Benedictine spirit in a very beautiful way. In our schools around the world, we have 8,500 teachers of whom only 10% are monks and sisters. So Benedictine education is in the hands of lay people and I believe that the Manquehue Movement has a special role in helping us all to understand how this might develop in new and creative ways. One of the distinctive features of the Manquehue path is the practice of shared *lectio divina* and you will see that every day we will do this together in our deanery groups. This together with our community prayer will give us times of profound listening to God, that silent listening made strangely powerful by the presence of our brothers and sisters whom Jesus Christ has drawn together in these days of special grace. The presence of people from so many different countries and cultures reminds us that this is a truly Catholic moment when the universal church is visibly present to us in the diversity of the body of Christ, the Church. This dimension will be symbolised also by

the presence of his Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio and will culminate in a special celebration of Mass in the *missa creolla* style led by the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Errazuriz, combining the universal and the local in our final celebration together.

We are in a Latino culture, the culture that brought us the word *fiesta* and I am pleased that there is a lot of *fiesta* in our conference. The Fiesta of All Saints Day, of course, but also the *fiesta* of *convivencia*, another special Spanish word which means enjoying life together. The North Americans may have invented the expression ‘enjoy’ as the prelude to good things but it is the Latin Americans who really know how to enjoy. Many people have worked hard to make this conference happen and many benefactors have donated generously to enable this coming together from around the world, so let us now celebrate BENET 2007 with heart and minds on fire with the love of Jesus Christ whose Spirit asks us to teach as Benedict did.