

June 2023 News from St Benedict's

Br Scott met with several clergy on retreat from the Rondebosch Archdeaconry in the days leading up to his departure for the US with Br Roger on 1 June. They attended the annual Chapter gathering of our Order at our Holy Cross Monastery in upstate New York. Brs Edwin and Josias were unable to accompany them due to difficulties with the US visa system. They did well to maintain the rhythm of the life of the Priory here in the absence of the other Brothers.

The week of Chapter saw Br Robert James re-elected as Superior of the Order to serve for another three-year term in that capacity. There were also elections of Council members and to other positions. Discussions of reports on the lives and experiences of the various communities and members of the Order during the previous year, with consideration of prospects for the future, are always a significant aspect of the Chapter meeting. We heard also from our Bishop Visitor, Bp Andrew Dietsche of New York Diocese, who presided at the Eucharist that day. Bp Stacy Sauls of Love Must Act reported on the encouraging situation of our Holy Cross School outside Makhanda in the Eastern Cape.

The Chapter gathering this year featured a workshop Towards Unity in Diversity, facilitated by Rev Chuck Kramer and Rev Masud Syedullah, which ran in several sessions through the meeting. The goal of the workshop was to enhance the appreciation of cultural and other differences as these enrich our community life. An especially valuable part of the workshop was the sharing by several Brothers of their experiences of cultural diversity in various situations from the history of our Order, including Liberia, South Africa, the Bahamas, and several multi-cultural communities in various parts of the US.

While we were at Chapter last year, it was interesting that national electricity-supply loadshedding was suspended for a period that coincided with our being out of South Africa. Loadshedding had been taking place at unprecedented levels in the period leading up to our departure for Chapter this year. There was therefore some wry amusement when Eskom announced the suspension of loadshedding within days of our arrival in the US.

The effects of climate conditions and weather patterns were quite prominent during this period. Prevailing winds brought smoke from many large Canadian fires down over New York State for several days, turning the air visible in unwelcome ways until the winds shifted. In contrast, there had already been enough rain for significant flooding (including the dislocation of the grotto bridge at Volmoed) in the Western Cape before we left for Chapter. Several severe storms shortly before our return resulted in catastrophic damage, knocking out the electricity supply for a number of days and causing widespread flooding that even isolated whole towns.

It was a pleasure once again to have a group of residents from our neighbouring Camphill community join us for the Eucharist on the last Sunday of the month. We have enjoyed having Erik de Jongh, the first Fellow of the De Gruchy Legacy Centre, who is at Volmoed for a couple of months, join us regularly at our chapel prayers. We look forward to Br Daniel's return to us at the beginning of July.