

BENET 2023 in Rio de Janeiro

Dear large and worldwide BENET family!

It is a great joy and honor for me to welcome you here today at the Sao Bento Monastery in Rio de Janeiro.

Such a meeting is not a matter of course, as the pandemic has shown us. We had to postpone our meeting for a year. Since the great BENET 2019 in Sydney, 4 years have passed, years that have changed the world. We had no idea at the time.

All the greater is the joy that we are able to hold a meeting here in Rio de Janeiro with ??? participants from 19 countries. The travel conditions are challenging for some of you. Getting visas and travel permits is very complicated in some countries. You have taken it upon yourselves and are here to participate in this great meeting. The local team, together with the delegates, has been thinking about the content of this meeting. What are our schools currently about? What do we want to accomplish with our schools? What do we want the students to take with them in life?

What we have received, we pass on to you: Our past and future in the now of Benedictine Education.

Benedictine education is the oldest educational tradition in the Church. Rooted in the timeless wisdom of St. Benedict, his Rule and his life, this Benedictine educational tradition has a unique contribution to make to the world today. We must adapt to changing times while remaining true to the Christian and Benedictine identity that gives meaning and purpose to all our endeavors. So says the invitation to our meeting.

This is what it is all about: perceiving the changing circumstances of life, making them fruitful for education, and remaining faithful to the Benedictine tradition. Even more briefly: to experience strength and meaning in the midst of the reality of life in our schools through the tradition of St. Benedict. A 21st century Benedictine school must be both modern and traditional. This is our great challenge in our daily lives. During these days we will try to face this challenge and to recharge our batteries for our service in the spirit of St. Benedict.

I would like to extend a special welcome to the first President of ICBE, Abbot Christopher Jamison. It's great to have you here to bring us back to the beginnings of BENET to the present day!

Our past president, Monsignor Elias Lorenzo, Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, would have liked to join us. Unfortunately, his schedule did not allow it.

A warm welcome to the delegates from the different countries in their various capacities, to our Brazilian friends, especially the local team who are working hard to organize this meeting, and of course to all of you who have come to Rio de Janeiro. May these be days we will remember for a long time!

My final but very warm welcome goes to our Abbot Primate, Gregory Polan, who is the head of the ICBE and the Benedictines worldwide. We are honored to have you in our midst and to work with you these days.

I know from conversations with Abbot Primate Gregory that he was very happy to come to Rio and that he wants to meet with as many of you as possible. The natural distance that comes with such an office can and should be overcome during these days. Abbot Primate Gregory wants to hear about your experiences, to share with you, and to learn about the situation in other countries. Where else can you talk to the highest Benedictine without an appointment? Take advantage of this opportunity!

It is my pleasure to introduce Abbot Primate Gregory Polan:

He entered Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri, in 1970. After studying philosophy and theology, he was ordained a priest in 1977. Abbot Primate Gregory went on to study music at Loyola University Chicago and the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. In 1984, he received his doctorate in Ottawa.

On November 6, 1996, he was elected the ninth abbot of Conception Abbey, a position he held for 20 years.

On September 10, 2016, the Abbots' Congress in Rome elected him the tenth Abbot Primate, the highest representative of the approximately 19,000 Benedictines worldwide. He presides over Sant'Anselmo Abbey on the Aventine in Rome and is also the Grand Chancellor of the Benedictine Pontifical College of Sant'Anselmo.

Abbot Gregory is known for his work in Bible translation and his specialization is in Psalms. He is also a musician and has composed many songs.

We are delighted that Abbot Primate Gregory will now speak to us.

Fr. Julian Schaumlöffel OSB
President of ICBE