

The Order of the Holy Cross in South Africa  
**Greetings from St Benedict's Priory at Volmoed**



During most of the considerable period that regrettably elapsed since our previous newsletter, life for much of the world seemed to be dominated by the pandemic and the effects of trying to control it. Now that the world finally appears to be emerging into some sort of new normal, supply systems and travel services are struggling to readjust, while the economic effects that have brought increased hardship to so many are far from resolved. The injustices experienced particularly by those disadvantaged by the inequalities in political and social systems have if anything been exacerbated. More recently, the ongoing consequences of corruption and war and environmental disaster, which had not ceased to be while our attention was on the pandemic, have become more apparent.

There is a lot to be concerned about, and much of it seems to be beyond our control. Jesus as recorded in the 13th chapter of Mark's Gospel was perhaps speaking about times such as these we live in. Astonishingly, though, he spoke in terms of birth pangs and the proclamation of good news.

Where is the good news? One has to look for it, as it seldom makes the front page, but it is there to be found. Glimmers of hope in acts of kindness and generosity. People reaching out to those around them, standing together against oppression, sharing with those in greater need, protecting the beauty that still remains in the world, working for the good of all. Signs of the kingdom of God among us, however subtle.

The answer that resonates with us is discovered in prayer and community. Prayer as a continual turning again towards God, through the day, day after day. Community as people living together in response to the gentle compassion and generous lovingkindness they experience in that turning. It is the answer that draws us to monastic life as one possible form of such prayer and community.

Volmoed and our monastic community here at St Benedict's Priory have not been exempt from the effects of the pandemic, reacting as seemed appropriate to the successive waves of virus variants and changing levels of lockdown. More of our life moved online, where we were able to continue meeting in some form with those on the outside and even offer spiritual direction and accompaniment. There was unexpected benefit to this, enabling us to be present in some way to people who would otherwise be too far away.

Being present is best accomplished face to face, though, and so we make the most of opportunities to connect in person. We seek to extend welcome and be hospitable in various ways, whether through our daily chapel prayers and the Thursday communion services and Sunday Eucharists, or through spiritual direction and accompaniment and facilitating retreats. Our chapel services are often significant points of contact with guests using the Volmoed accommodation. We also enjoy our ministry of interaction with and blessing of the pilgrims passing through Volmoed. We meet the most interesting people in these ways.

Our relationship with the Volmoed community itself has steadily deepened, and we are continuing our discernment of how best to be a part of Volmoed's future. One way that has emerged is participation in the youth ministry that has been developed at Volmoed, particularly through the regular Taizé youth days that bring significant numbers of young people onto the property. Volmoed is a place for healing and reconciliation, and we very much hope to be a part of that. It was good to be able to share a festive meal on St Benedict's Day with the residential Volmoed community and with all of the staff, who make all that happens at Volmoed possible.



Br Luc

Since our last newsletter, we have settled comfortably into our new accommodation on Volmoed. Two additional accommodation units that we originally intended to be adjacent to our first home on Volmoed in the Old Farm House were relocated to become an annex to the current Priory main house, and have been well used, providing accommodation to a young man who lived alongside our community for six months as well as to visiting brothers and to men testing their vocation to monastic life in our community.

There has been an increase in the number of men wishing to test their vocation with us, to the extent that we think we will need yet more accommodation relatively soon. At our Order's Chapter meeting in June, we were authorized to expand by two more accommodation units, and we have started the process of doing so.

One of the vocational enquirers recently completed a three-week visit with us, and has been invited to apply to enter the novitiate. Please pray for him as he continues his discernment. There are several others who will be making visits of various lengths in the near future.

That Chapter meeting mentioned above took place in person for the first time in three years, at the Order's Holy Cross Monastery in upstate New York, USA. It was good to be all together again. A spirit of gentleness and generosity prevailed.

The Superior and Council of the Order had agreed for Br Daniel to step down from his position as Prior of St Benedict's, and asked Br Roger to take on that role. This became official at the Chapter meeting. Br Daniel has been granted a well-earned six-month sabbatical, after ten years of leading this monastic community through several challenging transitions.

Following another week of being together with the larger community, Br Roger and Br Scott returned to the Priory together with Br Luc, who will be here for several months, having spent three months with us at the beginning of the year. Br Luc is now the Vocations Director for South Africa, which means he guides and accompanies men who are discerning a vocation to monastic life with our community. Br Scott has been appointed the Assistant Formator for South Africa, so he will be responsible for the initial monastic formation of men who enter the Order through this Priory.

Br Daniel remained in the US to start his sabbatical, returning to South Africa at the beginning of July. He is now in the UK on personal retreat, after which he will visit a couple of monasteries there with which we are connected.

As we approach the end of our third year at Volmoed, we continue to give thanks for the generosity of those who make our lives here possible, and to pray for faithfulness and courage to be witnesses of God's love and worthy participants in the building of God's kingdom.

Grace to you and peace from the Brothers at St Benedict's Priory.

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PS. There are more frequent updates on various matters in the Blog section of our website, at

<https://stbenedicts.org.za/>