

## Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique



## Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF DIMMID WILLIAM SKUDLAREK OSB

December 2016

Shortly after his election at the Benedictine Abbots' Congress in Rome on September 10, 2016, I informed Abbot Primate Gregory Polan that my third three-year term as Secretary General would come to an end on November 30<sup>th</sup>. He asked me if I would be willing to accept a fourth term, and I accepted his request. After consulting with Dom Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, Abbot General of the Cistercians and Dom Eamon Fitzgerald, Abbot General of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, Abbot Primate Gregory appointed me to an additional three-year term effective from December 1, 2016, to November 30, 2019.

#### Monastic-Muslim Dialogue

The most significant event for DIMMID this past year was a meeting of Catholic monastic men and women with Shi'a Muslims in the Iranian cities of Qom and Mashhad, May 9-14, 2016. The host for this year's meeting was Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali, Director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies in Qom and the Head of the Islamic Center of England. Also representing DIMMID at this year's gathering were Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, retired Abbot Timothy Wright (Ampleforth, UK), who coordinated this meeting, Brother Daniel Pont (En Calcat, France), Sister Lorraine Victorsen (Kedron, Australia), Father Maximilian Musindai (Tigoni, Kenya), Father Godefroy Ragueneau de Saint-Albin (Aiguebelle, France), and Dr. Corinna Muehlstedt, a German Lutheran theologian and journalist stationed in Rome. Sister Patricia Crowley (Lisle IL, USA) and Sister Gertrude Feick (Mt. Angel OR, USA) were also to be part of the monastic cohort but were unable to be present.

DIMMID's dialogue with Iranian Shi'a Muslims began in 2011 as a sequel to three Christian-Shi'a Muslim dialogues that had been organized by Dr. Shomali and Abbot Timothy. Those meetings took place in the UK in 2003, 2005, and 2007. The four specifically "Monastic-Mus-

lim” gatherings that followed were held in [Rome \(September 2011\)](#); in [Qom and Isfahan \(September 2012\)](#); in [Assisi and Rome \(October 2014\)](#), and this year in Qom and Mashhad. A fifth gathering is being planned for September 2017 and will take place at the monastery of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Nairobi (Karen), Kenya.

The theme of this year’s dialogue was “The Dignity of Being Human.” In addition to the presentation of papers, there were visits to museums, shrines, and a few of the 300 or so educational institutions that comprise the Qom Seminary with its 85,000 (75,000 Iranian; 10,000 international) students and faculty. These visits usually involved a presentation by the director of the institution, a discussion, and a meal.

Videos of the six morning presentations plus a guest lecture were produced by the International Institute for Islamic Studies and can be accessed by clicking on the presenter’s name:

[Dr. Moshen Javadi](#): An Islamic Perspective on Human Dignity

[Fr. William Skudlarek](#): The Dignity of Being Human: A Christian/Benedictine Approach to Human Rights

[Huj. Hamed Fayazi](#): The Rights and Responsibilities of Men and Women of Faith

[Fr. Godefroy Ragueneau de Saint-Albin](#): The Rights and Responsibilities of Men and Women of Faith

[Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali](#): Spirituality in the Shi’a Tradition

[Sr. Gertrude Feick](#) (read by Abbot Timothy Wright): Benedictine Spirituality and its Mystical Dimension: Gertrude the Great of Helfta (1256-1301/2)

[Dr. Mohammad Hasan Zamani](#): Foundations and Opportunities for Cooperation

On Friday, May 13, our hosts flew us to Mashhad, Iran’s second largest city and the site of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam of the Twelver Shi’ites. It is the largest mosque in the world by dimension and the second largest by capacity. The huge complex covers about 150 acres and contains, in addition to the shrine, a museum of the Qur’an, a library, four seminaries, a cemetery, the Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, a dining hall for pilgrims, vast prayer halls, and seven courtyards. It is visited by more than 10,000,000 pilgrims each year. On Saturday, May 14, we were received by the Shrine’s Director of Non-Iranian Pilgrims’ Affairs, Mr. Javad Hasheminejad, who arranged for our visit to be documented by the Shrine’s publicity department and televised. The English version of that newscast can be accessed [here](#).

### **Abbots’ Congress**

I was present for the entire Abbots’ Congress at which I gave a workshop on “The Place and Work of DIMMID,” showed our documentary film on six evenings (three for the French version, three for the English, both of which can now be accessed on YouTube: [English](#); [French](#)), prepared a display of the books published by DIMMID over the past several years, and helped staff the registration/information desk. I also informed all participants at the Congress that they could now purchase the printed version of the first five volumes of *Dilatato Corde* at a 50% discount.

Prior to the abbot's conference, I spoke to the Benedictine nuns and sisters who were delegates from the nineteen regions of [Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum](#) and were meeting in Assisi. In addition to giving them a report on the structure and recent activities of DIMMID, I informed them that earlier in the year, the Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Father Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, asked me to investigate the possibility of a Buddhist-Catholic dialogue for nuns. He said there were monasteries of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan that were interested in hosting such a gathering and had offered to cover all costs other than travel. I have asked the delegates to let me know by the end of January how many nuns or sisters from each of their regions would be able to respond to this invitation. Even if the number is small, I hope it will be possible to hold such a meeting in 2017 or 2018.

## **United Nations**

As I mentioned in my 2014 report, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, at its coordination and management meeting in July 2014, adopted the recommendation of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to grant [special consultative status](#) to DIMMID. A friend of DIMMID had recommended that we apply for this status, and the Board of Directors agreed with that recommendation.

I went to New York at the end of March and spent four days consulting with the UN representative of [Pax Christi International](#), with William Vendley, Secretary General of [Religions for Peace](#), with Archbishop Bernardito Auza, [Permanent Observer of the Holy See to United Nations](#), and with staff members of some NGOs sponsored by religious orders, in the hope of finding a way DIMMID could collaborate with or contribute to programs that they sponsor. I was received most hospitably, and several of the people I met with said they would be in touch with me about such collaboration or contribution. I followed up on my visits with emails, but have received no response.

Since DIMMID has neither the financial or personal resources to set up an office at the United Nations, and since at this point I am unable to determine how we might collaborate with other religion-based NGOs at the UN, I expect that our special consultative status will be terminated in 2019 when the first five-year report is due.

## **Other Activities**

In addition to administering the office of the Secretariat, I continue as webmaster of the [DIMMID website](#) and associate editor of the on-line and print editions of our journal, *Dilatato Corde*. Because so few copies of the print version have been sold—even after offering them to all monastic communities at a 50% discount—the editorial board has supported my recommendation that we discontinue the yearly publishing of each volume in book form.

I also continue my work as translator for the Ethnological Museum of the Vatican Museums and, with the agreement of my abbot, am able to contribute half of the stipend I receive to the operating budget of DIMMID. During this past year I also translated Father Pierre de Béthune's *À la rencontre des religions* ([Welcoming Other Religions](#)) and was a co-translator of *Monaci cristiani in terra cinese* ([Christian Monks on Chinese Soil](#)) by Fra Matteo Nicolini-Zani. Father Pierre, a monk of Clerlande Abbey (Belgium), was the first Secretary General of DIMMID and is now a member of its board of directors. Brother Matteo, a monk of Bose (Italy), is the coordinator of the Italian sub-commission of DIMMID. Both books were published by Liturgical Press in Collegeville, Minnesota.

As a counselor of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue I am regularly asked to edit and comment on the English version of messages and reports issued by the PCID.

In addition to those mentioned above, I was also involved in the following interreligious activities:

April 13

I lectured at Holy Family Parish, South Pasadena, California on [“Nostra Ætate 50 Years Later: Where We Have Come. Where We Hope to Go.”](#)

April 14

With the Rev. Kusala Bhikshu, an American Buddhist monk in Los Angeles and frequent collaborator with the North American commission for DIMMID, I spoke to chaplains of different religious traditions at the University of Southern California County Hospital on “Interfaith Perspectives on Health Care and End of Life Issues.”

I also visited [Hsi Lai Monastery](#) (Chinese Buddhist nuns) near Pasadena, where the first “Nuns in the West” meeting was held (2003).

June 24-30

Taking advantage of six weeks in Japan to help with the closing of Trinity Benedictine Monastery, where I had been a community member for five of my ten years in Japan, I visited Buddhist monasteries in Korea with Father Anselmo Park, a monk of Waegwan.

August 4

I joined the delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the twenty-ninth “International Day of Prayer for Peace” at Mt. Hiei, Kyoto, Japan.

November 29 – December 1

I participated in the annual meeting of the board of directors of A.I.M. at the Schottenstift in Vienna.

December 3-4

With Father Maximilian Musindai OSB (Tigoni, Kenya), I met with Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali at the Islamic Centre of England in London to plan for next year's Monastic-Muslim Dialogue in Nairobi, Kenya. The time in London also included interviews with Father Maximilian and me for a Shi'a television channel.

December 17

I invited the two resident monks (one from Sri Lanka, the other from Nepal) at the Minnesota Vihara in Minneapolis to Saint John's Abbey. Fr. Michael Peterson, President of the North American Commission for DIMMID and I were their hosts for a day-long visit.

## Future

As the demographics of Christian monasticism shift to the south and east, the future of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue will more and more depend on the involvement of monastic men and women from those same regions. Two monks who are eager to become more involved in the work of DIMMID, one from South Korea and one from Kenya, are completing their doctoral studies in areas directly related to interreligious dialogue. Father Anselmo (Jaechan) Park from Waegwan, South Korea, is finishing his program at [Regis College](#) in Toronto, Canada, with a dissertation on Thomas Merton and interreligious dialogue. Father Maximilian (Fredrick) Musindai from Tigoni, Kenya, is writing his dissertation for a doctorate from the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam ([PISAI](#)) in Rome. I am indeed pleased to be able to conclude this report with such promising news for the future of DIMMID!



May 16, 2016. Hsi Lai Temple, Hacienda Heights, Los Angeles CA. Ven. Man Kuang, Abbess.  
[More pictures below]



May 11, 2016, Qom, Iran, Mosque of Jamkaran. Abbot Timothy Kelly (England), Sr. Lorraine Victorsen (Australia), Dr. Corinna Muehlstedt (Germany/Italy), Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali (Iran/England), Abbot Notker Wolf (Germany), Fr. Maximilian Musindai (Kenya), Br. Daniel Pont (France), Fr. Godefroy Raguenet de Saint-Albin (France/Syria).



June 28, 2016, Jikji-sa, South Korea, a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. Fr. Anselmo Park (Waegwan), Prof. John Dadosky (Regis College, Toronto), Abbot Heungseon.



June 29, 2016, Sokcho City, Korea. Ven. Hyedam, Buddhist nun and celebrated artist



August 4, 2016, Mt. Hiei, Kyoto, Japan. Twenty-ninth "International Day of Prayer for Peace"



December 4, 2016. With Fr. Maximilian Musindai at the Shi'a television studio, London.



December 17, 2016. Bhante Seewalie and Bisho Kirti of the Minnesota Vihara in Minneapolis on their visit to Saint John's Abbey. Fr. Michael Peterson, President of the North American MID, is in the front row to the right of Bhante Seewalie.