

December 2024/January 2025 News from St Benedict's Priory

We are pleased to confirm that our Br Mpumelelo was formally approved for Initial Profession. We look forward to the ceremony on 1 February when he will make the monastic vow for a period of three years. Our Superior, Br Robert James, will be with us for his annual visitation and will receive Br Mpumelelo's vow. Please keep Br Mpumelelo in your prayers as he prepares for this significant commitment.

December began and ended with initial visits from two men whom Br Luc has been accompanying as they try to discern a possible vocation with our monastic community. Actually being present to our life here, praying with us, sharing meals and conversations, is of course a very important aspect of this discernment.

In between, Br Luc spend some time in Kenya. The South African visa process continues to be frustrating, and he needed to leave the country for a period anyway, so it seemed a good opportunity for a visit with family and friends.

Br Aelred also went to be with family and friends for a couple of weeks; in his case, to nearby Worcester.

While these Brothers were both away, there were times when Brs Mpumelelo and Roger prayed alone together with a few guests in the chapel. Br Daniel was recovering from some relatively minor surgery, and Br Josias was struggling with intermittent vertigo (which the appropriate medication and exercises relieved).

In contrast with that period when our chapel prayers were sparsely populated, more recently some prayer times have seen the smaller chapel almost full. We were joined by a sizeable group from the Trinity Wall Street parish in the USA, who are in South Africa on pilgrimage. Br Roger met with the group during their time at Volmoed, for a conversation facilitated by Rev Michael Battle regarding monastic perspectives on prayer. It was good to meet Sr Promise, one of three Sisters of St Margaret based at the parish in New York city, who is on pilgrimage with the group.

We were pleased to have Sr Patricia CHN, from a women's community in KZN, visiting with us for the final week of Advent and through Christmas. Her lively presence is always delightful. Our Christmas Day mass was well attended, including a number of those who regularly attend the Thursday communion service at Volmoed.

We continue our individual ministries of spiritual accompaniment, much of which takes place online. Our online presence was further expanded more recently through our first experiment with streaming our Sunday Vespers chapel prayer via Zoom, which seems to have been appreciated by those who could access it.

Earlier in December, Br Josias was able to be present at a well-attended event marking the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, in the local township of Zwelihle.

The ending of 2024 was accompanied by the ending of several earthly lives that had been significant to members of our monastic community at various times.

Our Br Laurence OHC had been the oldest member of our Order and the longest in vows. His funeral took place at our Holy Cross Monastery in the USA.

Sr Elaine SPB had been the last surviving member of the Society of the Precious Blood in South Africa, a community that had a significant prayerful presence at Masite near Maseru in Lesotho

during the apartheid years. Br Daniel, who had a long relationship with her, was able to attend her funeral in Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), where he met several members of her family.

Friar Fungayi CHT became known to us as the chaplain to the College of the Transfiguration when our community occupied the monastery outside Makhanda (Grahamstown) previously. He was serving as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Masvingo in Zimbabwe when he died.

Our dog Molly, faithful companion to our monastic community for over 13 years, finally succumbed to the cancer that she had been living with for several months.

As I write this, we are benefiting from our eight-day summer retreat, a time of greater quiet and increased solitude, facilitating individual prayer and reflection.