

THE BISHOPS FOUNDATION

Newsletter



August 2024 (2)

August 2024 Plenary - 5th to the 9th of August at Mariannahill



Twice a year the Bishops of the SACBC hold a plenary meeting. Joining the Bishops was the new Apostolic Nuncio His Excellency Archbishop Henryk Mieczysław Jagodziński who is seated between Wilfred Cardinal Napier and Stephen Cardinal Brislin.

In the public communique that followed the plenary the bishops committed themselves to further discussion, consultation and discernment on several issues raised by the President of the SACBC, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, most especially:

- 1. The abuse of alcohol by young people:** There is an alarming increase in alcohol and substance abuse among young people, necessitating more stringent laws against the liberal sale of liquor and the free reign drug lords seem to have. Consultation will be initiated to question whether a review of parts of the law, and possibly even the Constitution, is necessary regarding the sale of liquor.
- 2. Ordination of women to the diaconate:** The ordination of women to the diaconate needs further study and reflection, bearing in mind that this is a universal issue and not merely a local matter.
- 3. Ordination of Viri Probati*:** The concept and viability of Viri Probati is not a new issue but the bishops were of the opinion that further discernment needs to be given to the matter, especially in the light of the decreasing number of vocations to the priesthood. ***(Viri Probati: Proven men, of exemplary Christian life, who despite being married are ordained priests as in the early Church).**
- 4. The need for a National Dialogue:** In the light of the disappointments of the last 30 years of democracy, and in the light of the recent political developments in South Africa, the SACBC joins the many others in their call for a National Dialogue for a reflective and inclusive discourse on the needs of the country.

The bishops added their voice in expressing displeasure and hurt at the ridiculing and insulting of the Last Supper during the opening of the Paris Olympic Games. They called on all Catholics and Christians not to be discouraged at the mockery but to continue to hold firm in their faith.

The bishops welcomed the election of its new leadership: **Cardinal Stephen Brislin, President; Archbishop Zolile Mpambani SCJ, 1st Vice-President; Archbishop Mandla Jwara CMM, 2nd Vice-President.** The new leadership will assume their responsibilities at the close of the Plenary Session of January 2025. (Extracted from SACBC Communique at the end of the August Plenary)

Finding God in all spaces – Flea Markets

During a recent visit to a local market, I came across this fellow on one of the tables. It had to be an image of a saint, a saint who wore a garment of leaves. He was unfamiliar to me but after a Google



search for a saint dressed in leaves, I was able to identify him as St Onuphrius. He lived as a hermit in the desert of Egypt in the 4th or 5th centuries. He is venerated as in both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches, who traditionally mark his feast day on 12 June.

Onuphrius was one of the Desert Fathers who made a great impression on Eastern spirituality in the third and fourth centuries, around the time that Christianity was emerging as the dominant faith of the Roman Empire. At this time many Christians were inspired to go out into the desert and live in prayer in the harsh environment of extreme heat and cold, with little to eat and drink, surrounded by all sorts of dangerous animals and robbers. He became the patron saint of weavers due to the fact that he was depicted "dressed only in his own abundant hair, and a loin-cloth of leaves". Sicilians pray to Saint Onuphrius when they have lost something. St Onuphrius' relics are in a Church at Sutera in Sicily where a feast is held in his honour every 1st Sunday of August and the saint's remains are carried around the town with a priest, marching band and pilgrims.

Perhaps you are wondering if I bought him, well yes, I did. I must own up to the fact that I am rather fond of the saints, and you cannot have too many statues of them.

There is in Rome a Church dedicated to him Sant'Onofrio al Gianicolo. It is the official church of the papal order the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem which is an international Catholic order of men and women committed to supporting the Christian presence in the Holy Land through prayer and development work. There is an active group in Cape Town



You were a citizen of the desert, an angel in the flesh, and a wonderworker, O Onuphrius, our God-bearing Father. By fasting, vigil, and prayer you did obtain heavenly gifts, and you heal the sick and the souls of those who come to you in faith. Glory to Him who gave you strength. Glory to Him who crowned your life. Glory to Him who works for healing for all through you. (Orthodox prayer adapted)

Praying with the Pope – For political leaders

We pray that political leaders be at the service of their own people, working for integral human development and for the common good, especially caring for the poor and those who have lost their jobs.

SACBC Prayer for Southern Africa

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa.

May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence, and reconciliation where there is division.

May the Holy Spirit heal our families and communities.

Grant us ethical and courageous leaders who put the good of the people before their own interest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

we commit ourselves to speak the truth with courage,

to act justly in all we do, to share with those in need

and always and everywhere to respect your gift of life

as we strive to proclaim the values of the Kingdom in solidarity with all people of goodwill. Amen.

As July draws to a close, let us give thanks to God for guiding us and loving us through all that has happened this month.

Fr Hugh (BishopsFoundation@sacbc.org.za)