

Rundbrief aus Mariannhill April 2020

**Circular Letter 02/2020**

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

Dear confreres,

- **Introduction**

Since my last circular letter in January 2020, the world and our country are battling to contain the scourge of the Covid-19. Since its outbreak, the Covid-19, has caused global havoc thus bringing world economies to their knees and killing thousands of people. To date South Africa has recorded 4546 Covid-19 cases/infections with 87 deaths. We are grateful to God that 1473 of that number have fully recovered. We salute the manner in which our government and the department of health are handling this pandemic under very challenging circumstances. The World Health Organization (WHO) has praised South Africa for its effective response.

To date 178 470 South Africans have been screened and tested for the Covid-18, 4793 have tested positive, 1473 people have recovered and 90 people have died. The number of new cases continue to rise. To date the number of new cases stood at 247. The national lockdown has helped to minimize the speedy spread of the infections. I wish to thank all the confreres who continue to observe the very frustrating lockdown regulations by faithfully staying at home. This lockdown has negative impact on our confreres working in the parishes as they could not even celebrate Easter with the faithful whom they are supposed to shepherd. The economic situation of the parishes has therefore suffered a big blow.

The Monastery has suffered the same effects since we had to lay off all our employees in the workshops and all our places of work in compliance with Covid-19 guidelines. Even our two FSF Sisters had to join their community at Assisi Home, Mariannhill. We are grateful to the community and the novices who have to do all the work that our employees normally do: cooking and doing laundry for the community. They have been outstanding! The confreres take turns in cooking and washing dishes and doing all the other house chores. The lockdown has allowed confreres in the Monastery to do some extraordinary works in the Repository and Mission Press as well as cleaning the Monastery. The administration at Mater Dolorosa continues unwaveringly committed in providing good care of our elderly and sick confreres. Our retired professional nurse Mrs. Ngcobo had to work for weeks without a break. The list of sacrifices made do not go unnoticed and, I am grateful to everyone's involvement.

We are on day 32 of the national lockdown. On Friday 01 May we shall move to Phase 4 national lockdown. Under very strident regulations, some crucial business will be open just to try and lift up the ailing economy. None of our businesses fit under level 4 of the lockdown, so the status quo remains for us. I plead that we continue to be resilient and patriotic in observing all the regulations and be our brother's keeper. Let us get used to wearing masks especially when we go on public space.

- **Consequences of Covid-19 Pandemic and new mission possibilities**

As greater Mariannhill leadership i.e. the Diocese, St. Joseph Cathedral, the CPS Sisters and the CMM, we formed a structure last year which we named Disaster Management Team. We assisted people of Tshelimnyama and Mpola with basic needs after experiencing the severe storms.

We provided uniforms, cash, groceries and bedding.

When the Covid-19 Pandemic struck, we also came together to reflect on how we can be of assistance to our people. Just at that time we received an emergency request from St. Mary's hospital and the Department of Health (DOH) asking to utilize any of our structures which are not in operation as facilities for testing and keeping the Covid-19 suspects and patients. Many of our people across the river have no possibility to self-isolate or quarantine since so many of them living under the same household.

The CPS have offered their Guest House -Tre Fontane for this purpose. St. Joseph's cathedral will avail their grounds and hall as testing centers and provide food parcels. The Diocese will offer St. Francis College and Jubilee schools as centers for self-isolation depending on when the schools will re-open. Together with my council we have seriously considered availing the Mission Centre and the Retreat House as centres for quarantine and treatment of Covid-19 suspects and patients provided that there are clearly defined legal documents. Our consultation with St. Mary's hospital and the DOH are at an advanced stage. Our attorneys, Meauman White, and our Insurance Company are helping us with points that need to be added to the memorandum of understanding or lease with the DOH. We all agree that we need a legally binding document which indemnifies us from as many responsibilities and claims during that period of the lease. The DOH will bring their own medical, cooking, cleaning and security staff for caring for patients and they will pay us a fee for our structures. Patients or suspects are not allowed to move out of their rooms so there is no danger of infecting our confreres around the Monastery complex. The DOH will disinfect and decontaminate the places when the lease comes to an end. I have consulted with the General Government, the Southern African Bishop's Conference and Cardinal Wilfrid Napier OFM who is the chairperson of the Bishops in Durban Metropolitan, and they all support our initiative and wish to assist during these trying times. I am sure that *Abbot Francis Pfanner* and *Blessed Fr. Engelmar Unzeitig* would have responded positively to such an invitation and saw it as an opportunity for evangelization despite all its real challenges, fears and uncertainties since there is no cure or vaccine for this new virus. If you have a word of advice to the Council, regarding what we need to guard against as we formalize the contracts, please do so through the office of the Provincial Superior. Your prayers are sought in this regard since this is our first experience.

- **New assignments**
- **Sbusiso Mkhize CMM** has been assigned to Immaculate Conception parish in Manguzi. Thank you so much Fr. Mkhize for your sacrifice, willingness and ability to do institutional ministry soon after your ordination. You contributed so positively to the Monastery Retreat House and Mariannahill Coolock House. God bless you. He will leave for Ingwavuma Vicariate on the 04<sup>th</sup> May 2020. I sincerely thank Fr. Bernard Ngidi CMM who came out of his retirement to assist at Manguzi from the time Fr. Ndabenhle Mncwabe CMM passed away. He will return to Mater Dolorosa once Fr. Mkhize takes over the parish.
- **Deacon John Omalla CMM** is helping with some of the duties that used to be performed by Bro. Konrad Diethel CMM at the Monastery. After lockdown he will take up his new ministry at Emaus Mission and Emaus Heritage Centre. Thank you John.
- We welcome to our Monastery community **Emmanuel Nkoko CMM** who has been appointed the assistant novice director.

- **Owen Jimu CMM** is the new Provincial Secretary, Director of Candidacy and co-ordinator of the Youth Ministry.

This year we decided to combine our initial candidacy programme (new aspirants) with those of the Region of Mthatha. The formation committee has presented four names for admission but due to lockdown, the council has not been able to meet. The start of the candidacy programme has also been delayed. They were supposed to begin their programme this month. Fr. Owen will guide and form our candidates before they join the combined programme in Mthatha and he will also be responsible for our candidates who are studying at Cedara when they come to the Monastery for vacation.

- **Indult of Exclaustration and Leave of absence**
- **Geronimo Matimbe CMM** was granted a one year indult of exclaustration in March 2020. Kindly remember him in prayer.
- **Nkosinathi Dlamini CMM** completed his indult of exclaustration in March and rejoined the community in the Monastery. Once he has fully integrated in the community, he will receive his new pastoral assignment.
- **Callistus Ngcobo CMM** is still on his year of absence. He was supposed to return to the Monastery this month but national lockdown prevented him. We hope that he will join the community soon.
- **Terence Njodzi CMM** continues to be AWOL since his disappearance from the Monastery in May 2019. Since then we have not been able to establish communication with him. He does not respond to his emails and mobile phone. Kindly keep him in prayer. We thank Bro. Bheki Ngcobo CMM who took over the Blacksmith shop when Bro. Terence left.
- **Pilgrimages and official community gatherings**
- The May pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady of Fatima, Namaacha Mozambique, has been cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic
- The May pilgrimage to Emaus will not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- We are in touch with the General Government regarding the training course for perpetual profession, Council of Congregation (CoC) and training of Unit treasures which were all supposed to take place in our Unit this year. Once concrete decisions have been made, we shall duly inform you. The same goes for our Congregational feast in July and annual retreat in September.
- **Conclusion**

We thank God that He has protected our Monastery and the Province from experiencing Covid-19 positive cases. We remain in solidarity with the Province of Germany who have been badly affected by this pandemic. May God, through the intercession of Blessed Fr. Engelmar Unzeitig, continue to give us courage to forge ahead as prophetic witnesses of the Gospel during these challenging times. We congratulate **Deacons Gino Bembele** and **John Omalla** for having been admitted to priestly ordination. Due to covid-19 we are unable to set the date for ordination. The meeting for Unit Superiors of Africa was also called off last month.

Also:

- **Thamsanqa Njiyela CMM** continues to recuperate at Mater Dolorosa.
- **Philiasi Phiri CMM** has completely recovered from the health scare.
- **Thabani Khumalo CMM** already returned to Abbot Francis House after his minor medical procedure.

Let us keep one another in prayer. The National lockdown has provided so much time and space for personal prayer, self-introspection, intensifying ties with the community and completing those tasks that we always had no sufficient time to do.

The Executive Board of Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life (LccL) wishes to engage with all of the members in our conference. Since March 2019 I serve as a member of the executive and in March 2020 I was elected vice president. I encourage you to read the correspondence and guidelines of the conference especially during this time of national lockdown. We wish to respond to these challenging times with one voice and plan of action.

I entrust you and your ministry to the guidance and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church and the Mother of Mariannahill.

Yours faithfully

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**Fr. Bheki Shabalala CMM**

**Provincial Superior**