

Report on my journey to Europe: June 4 – 29, 2009

Dubai – United Arab Emirates 4 – 9 June

As I had been invited by Mrs. Philippa McHale, the daughter of Mrs. Helen Gamble, who wrote the book "*Mariannahill 1882 – 1982*" for our Centenary, I stayed four days in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The McHale family moved a year ago from Pinetown to Dubai, because Mr. McHale had got a position as a pilot with the EMIRATES Airline.

Dubai is the most extraordinary place I could think of. In 30 years it has grown from a little fishing village between desert and sea to the biggest shopping centre of the Middle East with a few million inhabitants. It is full of extremes: from the temperature (45 degrees Celsius) to the sky-scrapers and whole townships in the sea. In one shopping centre there is a ski resort (-3 degrees Celsius). In another shopping centre is an ice rink for skating. New seven Star Hotels (not only five Stars) cater for the most extraordinary tastes of the super-rich people of the world. The highest building of the world will be opened in September this year, more than 800m high. The new Metro is not underground, but all on bridges, respectively pillars. The local, indigenous population is only 10% of all inhabitants. The others are workers from India, Pakistan, the Philippines etc. My stay in Dubai left a somewhat bitter taste of how the rich of the world use or misuse the resources of the world, especially energy, though my host family has done everything to make my stay pleasant and memorable. Thank you for your extraordinary hospitality.

Langen / Vorarlberg 13 – 15 June 2009

After I had spent three days at my home in Greinhof near Burglengenfeld in Germany, I went by train to Austria, to Langen, the birthplace of Abbot Francis Pfanner. The mayor of this little town, Mr. Kogler, together with the provincial superiors of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, Fathers Dr. Hubert Wendl, Benno Hotz and Markus Bucher respectively, had organized a feast for the centenary of the death of the great son of this village. Many guests had been invited: the CPS Sisters came from Wernberg, Neuenbeken, and Heilig Blut (The Netherlands) and the Mariannahill Fathers and Brothers from Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

After many rainy days we had wonderful sunshine and the blessing of the "Pfanner Way" was done by the CMM Provincials and the Archbishop of Pretoria, Mons. Paul Mandla Khumalo CMM in the afternoon under pleasant sunshine. This "Pfanner Way" consists in five plaques on various

places in the village. On these plaques are the pictures of Abbot Francis and important words from his writings.

In the evening of the first day there was still a festive supper and a gathering with speeches and information about the life and work of Abbot Francis. I could shortly report on the state of the beatification process of Abbot Francis. On the second day there was a solemn High Mass, with Archbishop Paul M. Khumalo as main celebrant and preacher in German. Most of the guests left in the afternoon for home, after we had heard a music performance by artists from Wuerzburg. Some still visited the birthplace of Abbot Francis in Hub, 3 km from Langen on the German border. The farmhouse, in which he was born has recently been bought by a family Meier from Germany. The former owner, Mr. Fink, who had the farm for more than fifty years, has built himself a house near the farm.

Mariastern – Banja Luka in Bosnia 18 – 24 June 2009

The Symposium in Mariastern (“Mary the Star”) and Banja Luka was the actual reason for my trip to Europe. The Bishop of Banja Luka, Dr. Franjo Komarica, had invited me to give a talk about Abbot Francis at this symposium. 30 other speakers had been invited to show the importance of the Trappists in Banja Luka and Bosnia. The official title of the symposium was:

*Trappists in Banja Luka – Europe in Bosnia and Herzegowina;
140 years Trappists in the Abbey of “Mariastern” in Banja Luka
and 100 years of the death of its founder Fr. Franz Pfanner.*

The academic gathering was organized by the Diocese of Banja Luka, the Abbey of “Mariastern” and the Croatian Historical Institute. The speakers were professors and lecturers in history of various Universities and Institutes. The language was Croatian, but the talks were simultaneously translated into German and English. I held my talk in German. All the talks will be published in book form to make them accessible to a broader public. There were also two new books available about the Monastery Mariastern, one in Croatian and the other in Croatian and German (*Mariastern und seine Trappisten* by Nikolaus Friedwagner, 2nd edition 2008).

The aim of the symposium was, and that was stressed by the Bishop of Banja Luka, the main organizer, to show the great and beneficial influence of the Trappists in the whole of Bosnia, especially during the first ten years

under the prior Franz Pfanner. It was said that with the Trappists *Europe* came to Bosnia. This country had long belonged to the Turkish Osman Empire and had almost no connection with Europe. For hundreds of years there were Catholics in the country, but they were nearly all servants of the Moslem population. It is a pity that the monastery was badly damaged by the earthquake in 1969 and suffered under the Communist rule and during two world wars.

In the recent past there has been again war in the Balkan countries. Tens of thousands of people were murdered. I was told that in Bosnia alone 662 priests had been killed and many people persecuted and driven from their homes. Parishes with 2000 faithful might now have only a few hundred left. The Catholics – and also many Muslims – have suffered terribly and are still wounded. The Bishop told me many stories, how the people had to suffer. The scars are still visible in destroyed houses and churches. Those who managed to flee, emigrated to other countries.

To understand the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is difficult. People from the country even told me, that they themselves do not understand why there was so much fighting and killing. One reason was and still is that the Serbs want to build a big empire. But there seem to be many other undercurrent motives for the hatred and tension among the different ethnic groups. Bishop Komarica, who is also internationally known as a peace-loving man, stressed the contribution of the Trappists to bring peace and prosperity to the country. This symposium has surely contributed to a better knowledge of this fact and to the importance of the presence of the Trappists in the country. This is also the reason why the bishop fights very hard that the monastery of Mariastern may remain and not be closed, as the Trappist Generalate in Rome wants. There are at present only two monks in Mariastern and there is one monk from the monastery of Sept Fons in France who has the task to close the monastery. The bishop, as I said, is against this move. The outcome remains uncertain.

This visit to Mariastern has made me aware of many things, which we Mariannhillers do not know or have forgotten. But Mariastern belongs to our roots and we should not neglect them. I also realized, that Abbot Francis is very much venerated in Mariastern and by the Diocese of Banja Luka. They are fully behind the idea for the beatification process to go ahead. The importance of the first ten years of the Monastery of Mariastern under Prior Franz Pfanner was sufficiently stressed. We can help them through our prayers, that God may bless their work. I am very grateful for the hospitality of Bishop Komarica and I would like to thank

him for everything he has done to make my stay in Bosnia pleasant and fruitful. May God bless his work for peace and reconciliation in the country.

Suggestions for the Beatification Process of Abbot Francis Pfanner

One concern during my journey to Europe was to get some practical advice for the beginning of the beatification process. Bishop Stanley Dziuba of Umzimkulu, who is now the “competent bishop”, is keen to start. He has already asked a few people whether they are prepared to collaborate in the evaluation of the documents. He might soon call them together to brief them about their task and to distribute the material, which has been collected (60 files of documents). The postulator is supposed to know exactly what has to be done and to give the necessary instructions. But the postulator, that is myself, was himself not sure about certain procedures. Therefore I asked the postulator of the causae of Therese Neuman (the “Konnersreuther Resl”) and of my classmate Bernhard Lehner in Regensburg, Domvikar Georg Schwager, what the necessary steps are. He could give me very practical answers to my questions, which I can hand on to the members of the forthcoming process. For this I am very grateful. May God bless the work to the greater honour of the founder of Mariannahill.

I am very grateful that I have been allowed to make this journey, which has given me much experience and joy.

Fr. George Maximilian Lautenschlager CMM
Postlator.