

4 September 1988

RE: Michael Bik

I spoke to Michael this afternoon about summer work as well as about the fall schedule. With regard to this past summer, first of all, he was generally pleased with what had gone on. He enjoyed working with Jim T. and the bishops, though he (along with Timo) felt that substantial changes should be made in the event that the bishops come back again.

He also spoke positively about working with the camps, though he admitted that squeezing in a vacation between the last one and Prep School workshops was not easy. He seemed to have the most difficulty with the aftermath of Otto's death. Apparently some of the counseling staff had difficulty adjusting to any changes in format (Otto's way of doing things was considered the only way to do things in some minds). Also, Otto wrote down nothing, so the staff had no idea of what all should be done and how to do it in some instances. Michael said he was very pointed after a memorial mass for Otto, telling some people that we have to bury Otto, let his way of doing things go, and make our own decisions as to what should be done. This did not go over well with some staff members. And, it is clear that many people are needed to fill in for Otto; future changes may call for quite a few monks/lay staff to handle all that Otto did.

The other frustrating part of the summer was different expectations about beginning the school year. Michael expected Nathan to come directly here from Hastings (but some vacation time intervened). Michael expressed some problems in adjusting to Nathan's rather free style. Michael seemed unsure of just what Nathan wanted to do this year, and realizes that he will have to adjust to yet additional changes in leadership with Tom/Nathan, etc.

Michael also said he enjoyed his summer classes.

I told Michael that I had two problems with his summer: taking over cars while Placid was away (which I had chided him about earlier); and wandering off to the Prep School for extra hours of work. I mentioned his filling in for an ill counselor/leading a discussion as an example of taking on more work without first checking with me. I told him that I am a stickler for procedure, and these situations did not follow procedure--and would only open him up for grief.

We then moved into the question of his current work schedule. I asked him for a complete daily schedule of his work, etc. (showing him a schedule that Michael-Thomas prepared, as an example). This led to two discoveries on my part: he has divided his Christian Spirituality class into two classes (instead of all the kids meeting on 1-3-5, he now has two smaller groups on 1-3-5 and 2-4-6). Also, he is sitting in on a calligraphy class that meets at 8:10 on even days. I repeated to him that these were yet additional examples of how he was going in just the opposite direction I wished: he was changing/adding things to his schedule without consultation beforehand. I repeated that this was not the proper procedure and would only get him into trouble. I pointed out that any such changes/additions should be discussed with me or Dale or Rene before they took effect, and I should not learn about it only by the way afterwards. He explained that he didn't mean to upset anyone (I agreed), but saw these

changes in terms of what was best for the class (two smaller sections) and what was good for him (a creative outlet through an art course--an area he feels starved from). I acknowledged these good side-effects, but repeated the need to talk first, then make adjustments. The extra class period means he is committing himself to additional hours up there; and the calligraphy time runs into the juniorate morning coffee period.

It seemed that on this sour note our conversation would end, until I asked how things were going with personalities--mentioning nearly every monk at the Prep School. With Matthew's name began a longer conversation about work and presence at the Prep School. Michael spoke of his irritation with Matthew's hours to date. I would summarize his comments by saying that Michael seemed to see himself as more reasonable, more willing to bend: putting in time and appearances as seemed needed; being available; gaining the trust of the kids so they could talk more freely. In other words, following the spirit of his campus ministry schedule by being present often. Matthew, on the other hand, seems to be more rigid, more determined to keep things to a minimum. He might be seen as more of a legalist--exact hours, little bending for the Prep School when his personal time was at stake. Michael cited an example: on Friday everyone was asked to be present for an all-school picture, then go to the football game in Uppsala. Michael went to the game on the sophomore bus, where he felt he belonged: in order to be seen, talk to the kids, etc. He felt that Matthew should have gone on the frosh bus for the same reasons. In fact, Matthew went with Bernie and David O. both ways. Michael was cautious about trashing Matthew, and granted there are different styles, but he did not like this--apparently because he genuinely feels that presence is important, and I would guess, because the contrast between the two makes Michael look like he's even more involved in the Prep School.

Michael mentioned another problem area. Nathan is rather free, apparently, with giving our assignments for campus ministry work--though Michael has made it clear there is a limit to what he'll do and is pleased in general that Nathan's style is not that of Cisco's. Michael is uneasy with Matthew's role; he grants that Matthew may not have all the necessary abilities, but still seems to be reluctant to do some jobs. (When, for example, Nathan asked Matthew to do some xeroxing, Matthew refused saying he didn't do clerical work. So Michael and others ended up doing the work, and thereby, having to give more time to whatever the project was.)

It is clear that there will have to be some adjustments made as far as dealing with the various styles/mentalities/abilities here: Tom Andert, Nathan, Michael, and Matthew!

This, in turn, led to a much longer conversation about Michael and the juniorate. He expressed irritation with being perceived as always at the Prep School when, he feels, he tries very hard to do things in the juniorate and finds no interest on others' part--or simply no one home night after night. He mentioned several specific times when he stayed here all night with the intention of being with his fellow juniors, but sat alone for the evening. He repeated the on-going alienation with his classmate. He mentioned his own hesitancy to organize too many things in the juniorate because he did not want to be perceived as taking over, and especially as taking over the job of the senior junior (David R.). [Whatever responsibilities the senior junior has in this regard is news to me, but Michael said that at the end of his novitiate Timothy

took him aside and specifically told him to go easy on organizing things because David was the senior of the class. This is problematic because David, in Michael's eyes, doesn't do enough, isn't interested in putting on meals, etc., like Michael would like to do.] Michael also said that as the only extrovert in the juniorate, he wanted/needed more gatherings, more planning of things, and did not feel this part of his life was being addressed in the juniorate. [It would seem that when he can't find the companionship/attention he wants here, he moves to the Prep School.]

I told Michael I understood some of his frustration with the general absence of people from the juniorate. That has been my feeling for years (long before working in this program). I also repeated to him the need to realize that with many different people and different work schedules, our ability to be available and not exhausted may vary much from person to person and from day to day. I encouraged him, as I did my RAs, to plan more carefully: when he knows he'll have a free evening, spread the word beforehand. Just appearing in the rec room will not work. Also, he will have to tell people that when he is working in the rec room (on Prep classes), he is available for chit chat and interruptions. (Others may assume that he's busy with class preparations and should not be bothered.) And try to learn what others' schedules are: Benedict, for example, usually arrives here about 3:00 or 3:30. That would be a good time to be around. I also encouraged him [despite Timothy's cautioning] to try to organize things in advance, even though he may never get more than half the juniors to do anything together. If nothing else, maybe the visiting monks may be more interested. And, don't forget about others in the community: go for a walk with the novices; invite Joshua or Isaac to do things here or elsewhere; make an appearance throughout the greater community. This will not be easy, but it should be worth a try. Putting as much energy into being with monks as with Preps should be a goal.

This, finally, led to a few words about Halloween and other such bigger events. Michael would love to do more: plan meals for days of reflection, Halloween parties, Prior's birthday, etc., etc. But he wonders about being perceived as taking over all such matters, and realizes how much and varied agendas there were last year (Halloween). He would love to see more gatherings among juniors, with Saint Ben's, etc. He only feels frustrated by the general foot-dragging around here.

I continue to be irritated that Michael did not consult about the various changes in his schedule. If he could take the time to ask his students if they were willing to divide a class into two classes, then I think he could have spoken to me about it as well. This will be the source of further discussions,

At the same time, I understand his frustration with having a particular expectation and ideal of what community means, and being totally unable to find that outlook shared among the juniors. (I've been there too!) I don't like all the time he spends with the Preps, but "you go shopping where the stores are." And it seems that the juniorate (and other parts of the monastery as well) is all too often going out of business, out to lunch, or closed for the season.

Robin, O.S.B.