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# aim usa

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Birthing Hope



# Birthing Hope in Compassion

Guatemala  
Brazil  
Chile

## From Guatemala

Photo credit: Hna. Susana Padilla Ordorica, OSB



*Isolated sisters pray for families affected by the pandemic.*

During the pandemic we became more sensitive to our brothers and sisters who do not have food to eat, or paid work, or have suffering because of family who have died. We were not able to be around them when they needed it or to accompany them to the burial. As missionaries we have been affected by the fact that there is no presence of our services in the villages we serve. We cannot accompany the people in their sufferings and loneliness. We have been affected by not having income. The deficient Public Health System that affects the town was made visible. The solidarity aid was not delivered. Unjust evictions and invasions of peasant and indigenous lands multiplied. We pray with hope and faith that Our Father God will act.

**Hna. Susana Padilla Ordorica, OSB**  
**Comunidad Reina de la Paz**  
**Verapaz, Guatemala**

## From Brazil

For us, to cope with the pandemic situation has been a mystery, something difficult to grasp and put into words. Fifteen days after the first cases of the coronavirus we closed our guest house and our shop. We changed the time of Mass and stopped hearing confessions and giving spiritual direction. We decided not to close our church and therefore have a small number of people coming.



Photo credit: Dom Gabriel Vecchi, OCSO

*Prayers for healing.*

Our vocation director developed a Liturgy of the Hours for our candidates to be used during Holy Week to be in communion with us. We also intensified our contributions to those more in need, offering food, products from our bakery, fruits from our garden and also financial help for charitable institutions in our diocese. We set up a website for our products and a page on Instagram. We sell more through the internet than in our shop. We are developing

new products and the whole process involves more members of our community.

May the Lord open our hearts to understand every single sign He is sending to us in this mysterious time of ours.

**Dom Gabriel Vecchi, OCSO**  
**Abadia Trapista Nossa Senhora do Novo Mundo**  
**Campo do Tenente, Brasil**

The pandemic has grown considerably and many suffer. Our monastery is poor. We work hard. We have a school that has now closed until January 2021. We sell sweets, cakes, but we also cannot continue to sell them because of COVID-19. Our city of Campo Grande no longer has a hospital to serve people. We trust in Divine Providence.

**M. Elisabeth da Trindade Alves Ferreira, O. Cist.**  
**Mosteiro Cisterciense Nossa Senhora Aparecida**  
**Campo Grande, Brasil**

## From Chile

From the pandemic we learned to depend on others for basic needs, remedies, groceries, agricultural inputs. In terms of work we have had to close our workshops and guest house. This has made us more focused on what is essential, Opus Dei, fraternal life and ongoing formation. The decrease in external contacts: telephone, porter, guesthouse, visits have favored greater recollection and silence.



Photo credit: M. Moira Benia Salvadores, OSB

*Spiritual enrichment, fraternal life are part of the daily reflections during the pandemic.*

Our hope is that humanity turns its gaze to God, changes, where we become more generous people and return to a simpler and truer life.

**M. Moira Benia Salvadores, OSB**  
**Santa Maria de Rauten**  
**Quillota, Chile**

## ON THE COVER

The pencil sketch of the manger scene was drawn by Sister Francis of Fatima Ho Kieu My Nhu, O Cist. She is a temporary professed sister from Vinh Phuoc Cistercian Abbey in Bien Hoa-Dong Nai, Vietnam.

# Birthing Hope in Fragility

Mexico

## From Mexico

Contributed Photo



*As the pandemic shapes our lives the brothers pursue some favorable adjustments to the community and spiritual life. A safe place to be where faith can grow.*

All our communities just south of the US border are tensed between fear and hope. Significant adjustments are felt now in our kitchens and dining rooms, chapels, our apostolic outreach, future planning, hospitality and formation. Some communities have been struck hard with the contagion and its social and economic repercussions, to say nothing of the overload in health services and care for the infirmed. The free-floating apprehension in the face of the contagion and threatened death makes us all aware of our fragile hold on life and misery all around us and of families and individuals faced with dire poverty.

Liturgy in community appears to be more vital; perhaps community prayer is a relief, a safe place to be and where we find something or someone outside the self.

During seven months of the pandemic's hold on our life and consciousness, and some favorable adjustments in our community life, divine providence continues to radiate her sublime face, but uncertainty about how long, where, when and whom, wears even on the faith life of consecrated monastics.

Konrad Schaefer, OSB  
Monasterio Nuestra Senora de los Angeles  
Cuernavaca, Mexico

## AIM International Council Meets

This year's **AIM INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL** meeting scheduled to occur in Rome, Italy on November 23-24, 2020 included 23 members. Due to a spike in COVID-19 cases in Europe and the USA, the entire meeting went virtual. This group is committed to addressing the vision and future, the concerns and challenges of our monastic sisters and brothers around the world.



Photo credit: Hna. Maria Teresa Razo Lagena, OSB

*All we need is each other.*

Living this experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is disconcerting because with all the advances in science and medicine the virus could not be controlled. We learned that confinement is not something terrifying because it helped to strengthen affective spiritual ties. Our community life was strengthened in communication, creativity, dialogue, reflection, and in sensitivity to human pain.

We recognize that well used technology can be a good means of evangelization and communication. We are able to be more affectionate, close because we know above all we need each other. God loves all human beings because we are His creative work.

Hna. Maria Teresa Razo Lagena, OSB  
Misioneras Guadalupanas de  
Cristo Rey  
Ciudad De Mexico, Mexico

## Missionary Cooperative Program

This has been a different year for the Missionary Cooperative Program where mission appeals are given in parishes.

**AIM USA** was accepted to speak in seven dioceses. Then COVID-19 happened. All dioceses were put on hold for appeals.

Three appeals were actually given: in the dioceses of Camden, NJ by Sr. Philomena Fleck, OSB, Cleveland, OH by Br. Peter Ancell, OSB, and Syracuse, NY by Sr. Donald Corcoran, OSB.

We are grateful to these monastics for their commitment to **AIM USA**.



# Birthing Hope in Poverty

Philippines  
India  
Viet Nam

## From Philippines

During the pandemic we lost our major source of income. Our gift shop where previously many tourists came and bought our products was closed. We had fewer orders from our distributors. There is less travel in the city Iloilo because of restrictions. We have had to change the monastic horarium (schedule) to have more time to rest and so to have more resistance and stamina to fight the pandemic. Meals are very frugal because of almost no income.

We manage to have less and just bear with the basic needs. We continue with our lives as usual. Our prayer is that the pandemic will be over soon, and we learn to appreciate and live with just the basic things of life.

**Abbot Gerard Ingusan, OCSO**  
**Our Lady of Philippines Trappist Abbey**  
**Legazpi City, Philippines**

## From India



Photo credit: Kurisumala Ashram

*Dairy farming has allowed our ministries to share resources and ease the burden for a few.*

Since we are part of the Strict Observance branch of the Cistercians, we have no external ministries. This means the impact of COVID-19 on our life has been minimal compared to those who are struggling to keep their head above water.

Our economy has been impacted by the lock-down restrictions, but since milk is classified as an “essential commodity”, the government never restricted its sale (our livelihood is based on a dairy farm). Since many small cafes and hotels had to close or operate at full capacity due to restrictions, our income has been adversely affected.

The community has come to a deeper appreciation in our communal worship. The added meaning it has given to our life of intercession for the suffering world is a shot-in-the-arm for us. We have re-learned the necessity of self-sufficiency. The joy of being able to share our resources and to lighten the burden of at least a few in need has been a highlight.

**Brother Augustine, OCSO**  
**Kurisumala Ashram**  
**Kerala, India**

As a religious congregation we felt it is our moral obligation to come forward and join hands with the government to fight this social issue. As a first step, the sisters made a survey in the affected slums to study the magnitude of the problem. The issue of the poor and migrant workers was one of the most cruel and pathetic in the pandemic. Thousands were unemployed and stranded without money, food and shelter, crossing the country's highways to return

to their villages, several meeting with accidents and death on the journey. The community helped the migrants by providing food and water on their way. Despite our financial crisis we supported more than thousands in different villages, in three districts of Madhya Pradesh with distribution of food and

sanitary items. God has given us this opportunity to ponder our lives and trust Him and Him alone completely relying on His Providence.

**Sr. Vandana Paliakkara, OSB**  
**Ashirbhavan Priory**  
**Bhopal, India**



Photo credit: Sr. Vandana Paliakkara, OSB

*Sisters visit affected slums and evaluated the need for food and shelter.*

## From Viet Nam



Photo credit: Sr. M. Lucy Tran Thi Minh Huong, O Cist.

*In September the sale of vegetables resumed.*

The New Year 2020 began with the pandemic COVID-19. The first time was from February to April and the second from July to August. Our daily life was difficult. We had no income for all our labors. Churches had no Masses, therefore no need for holy hosts. There were no buyers for chasubles, altar

linens, vestments, pharmaceutical products or green vegetables. All our workshops were closed. Now, in September the churches are open and our host machines are working again. It is the happiest thing!

**Sr. M. Lucy Tran Thi Minh Huong, O Cist.**  
**Our Lady of Vinh Phuoc Cistercian Abbey**  
**Tan Hoa-Bien Hoa, Viet Nam**

## Staff Changes at AIM USA

Sister Therese Glass, OSB has been a sign of hope for many monasteries through her work with **AIM USA** for the past nine years. Her interest in and her commitment to the mission monasteries by sending books, maintaining personal connections to gather newsletter information and coordinating the Mission Cooperative Program has been monumental. As Sister Therese moves on may she be blessed, for she has been a blessing to us and to the mission world.

As Sister Therese leaves, we also **welcome** Debbie Tincher. She begins part time ministry with us sorting, categorizing, and packing books for distribution. Debbie is familiar with AIM USA as she has done all AIM mailings for years.

# Birthing Hope in Fear

Tanzania  
Uganda, East Africa  
Eritrea

## From Tanzania



Photo credit: Sr. Ruth Bartonica, OSB

*Suspension of schools created a loss of valued community and social gatherings.*

The onset of the pandemic brought uncertainty and anxiety to members of our community.

In a culture where community and social gatherings are valued, not hosting important social gatherings and limiting attendance were big sacrifices for us.

Our two schools were not spared from the threat of lost students and of school fees. During the suspension we paid our employees their full salaries for the reason of justice. We were most hit financially by COVID-19 with the scare in our health ministry. Because of fear of contracting the virus in our health center, only a few people came for medical care, however housekeeping costs increased along with needed supplies.

The pandemic has affirmed that we cannot be certain of the future. But God, in mercy and love, has endowed each one of us with limitless creativity to cope with the difficulties and challenges of the present. The COVID-19 cannot incapacitate us because God is not unjust. This is our hope.

**Sr. Ruth Bartonica, OSB**  
Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing  
Peramiho, Tanzania

## From Uganda, East Africa

Our community like many other communities in the country responded to the death threat by adopting preventive measures. It took time for us to get used to these new regulations which at times are a source of tension among the brothers.

Two of our brothers were outside the country when borders were closed. They remain unable to come back. We were supposed to have our Regular Visitation but that wasn't possible.

Since July 2018 we have undertaken the expansion of building a new church, guest house and novitiate. At certain points all these building activities had to stop and disrupted our community future plans. Our neighbors were most affected. Many can only put food on the table if they have been able to work that day. It was hard to imagine how they survived the lockdown.

We share the same hope as others that a solution to this pandemic (vaccine or cure) will be found soon.

**Dom John Bosco Kamali, OCSO**  
Our Lady of Victoria Monastery  
Uganda, East Africa

## From Eritrea



Photo credit: Abba Negusse Woldai, O. Cist.

*Cistercians look to hope and faith with obedience and respect for a rapid resolution during this pandemic.*

I arrived in Rome March 2020 to meet with my Abbot President Dom Eugenio Romagnuolo. Rome was on lockdown. The Abbot President contracted COVID-19 and died on April 4. Two other monks of our Congregation died two weeks prior to the pandemic (but not from the virus). Funerals for all three were not held until June 13. On July 23 we elected a new Abbot President.

Now I am waiting to go back home to Eritrea. Personally, this time is depressing, but thanks to prayer, encouragement and communication with my brothers, I am coping.

The first correct reaction that we must have, as an Order and as monastics is to follow the indications of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to contribute, with obedience and respect, to a rapid resolution of this epidemic. It is crystal clear that we are all jointly responsible in both good and ill.

My hope is that humanity in general will learn how weak we are, left to ourselves without God, and recognize God as our Creator. Despite our technical advances we are stopped by a tiny virus.

**Abba Negusse Woldai, O. Cist.**  
The Cistercian Abbey of the Assumption  
Asmara, Eritrea

## Mass Offerings

**AIM USA** sends **MASS OFFERINGS** to Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. These offerings are extremely important to them, especially in these times. If you wish to remember someone who has died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or have another intention, please send it to:

**AIM USA**  
345 East 9 Street  
Erie PA 16503 USA



# Birthing Hope in Communities United States of America

***While the numbers of COVID-19 cases increase and the death toll rises in the USA, two monasteries care for their own members and extend support and compassion to their mission monasteries.***

## From USA

The recommended restrictions to curtail the spread of a COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted established patterns of community life at Saint Vincent Archabbey where 92 monks pray and work. Masks, social distancing and sanitizing everything one touches gives a message of avoidance of others which can be seen as contrary to community. The restraints have produced an exercise in patience - awaiting, spurring our creative powers, spirit driven power (God powers) to adapt and evolve - and make rough ways smooth.

One major disruption is in our pastoral work. All churches were closed for a period of time; now opened with limited capacity. Saint Vincent monks minister full time in 30 parishes and on weekends at an additional 25 churches. Services to the faithful and sacramental ministry have all been limited. How to encourage faithfulness to community worship and communal awareness is in much discussion.



*St. Vincent Archabbey now open with limited capacity is able to minister to 30 parishes and 25 churches.*

Our income for our foreign missions in Brazil and Taiwan has been affected. Our annual "mission appeal" from parishes assigned to the Archabbey by seven local dioceses (25 parishes) did not happen this year. The availability of Mass

requests with stipends for the missions has dried up because funeral homes have reduced visitation opportunities.

One of the many blessings during the pandemic is that within the Archabbey, our priories in Taiwan and in Brazil and our Military High School in Savannah, Georgia (USA) there has been only one case of COVID-19 infection and that monk has recovered. We are truly blessed.

**Prior Earl Henry, OSB  
St. Vincent Archabbey  
Latrobe, PA. USA**

One of the most difficult things about the pandemic for the sisters at Mount Saint Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, has been the interruption to normal interactions not only with the public but within the community. Because Dooley Center is a licensed care facility, special restrictions are in place to protect the residents from the consequences experienced by many nursing homes. The sisters in that part of the building cannot come to the main monastery chapel and dining room and no other sisters can go into that area. Consequently, technology has been playing an increasing part in life. Prayers and other activities are broadcast to the Dooley residents' individual devices. Liturgies are also available to the public on the community's website. Oblate directors, spiritual directors, and the staffs of Keeler Women's Center and Sophia Spirituality Center maintain contact via digital means. On the positive side, no sisters have been infected, countless masks and other protective equipment have been made, and the technology has expanded the community's outreach in new and unexpected ways. The community supports a Brazilian mission of five sisters. There is great concern in Minieros, Brazil where there are many cases of COVID-19.

**Sister Judith Sutera, OSB  
Mount Saint Scholastica Monastery  
Atchison, KS. USA**



Image: www.mountosb.org

## Support The Mission Of AIM USA

***Your financial support is greatly appreciated!***

AIM USA is a 501 (c) 3 organization. All contributions to AIM USA are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

Please make checks payable to: **AIM USA.**

**Send to: 345 East 9 St. Erie, PA 16503  
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## Staff Contacts

### Executive Director:

**Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB**, [director@aim-usa.org](mailto:director@aim-usa.org)

### Missionary Cooperative Coordinator/ Office Manager:

**Sister Christine Kosin, OSB**, [aim@aim-usa.org](mailto:aim@aim-usa.org)

**AIM USA Phone: 814-453-4724  
Website: [www.aim-usa.org](http://www.aim-usa.org)**

# Birthing Hope in Leadership

United States of America  
Italy



Sr. Lynn McKenzie, OSB & Abbot Gregory Polan, OSB

Our plans, our schedules, our hospitality all changed. Nothing was normal outside of our monastic horarium (schedule) of prayers and common meals. As the weeks have turned into months, we miss the very natural hospitality of receiving guests as Christ in our homes.

People have looked to us for signs of hope and faith in this pandemic time. We see this in articles published during the spring and summer months in which monastic women and men were interviewed and asked for their wisdom of how to live well this pandemic time. What do our monasteries have to offer to this pandemic afflicted world? We have our round of liturgical prayer that we pray faithfully day in and day out and with song filled hearts. We have love for each other and for all our brothers and sisters around the globe for whom we pray. We have our fidelity to the monastic way of life. We ask God in this pandemic time to bless our work and prayer and bring it to completion. (RB Prologue 4; Philippians 1-6) May God bring us all together to everlasting life. (RB 72:12)

**Sister Lynn McKenzie, OSB**  
**President of the Federation of St. Scholastica**  
**and CIB (Communio Internationalis**  
**Benedictinarium)**  
**Sacred Heart Monastery**  
**Cullman, AL. USA**

Many have asked, "What do you think life will be like in the future when we have passed through the pandemic?" I would suggest that at this time we are constructing now what life will be like in the future; we are already living in the choices we have had to make. Our prayer and our reflection of life in this new context have enabled us to keep our Benedictine life alive; in addition to this we have seen how we can be of service to others.

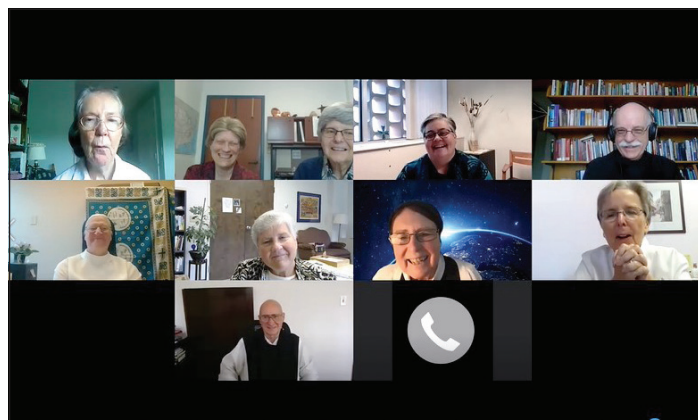
In Pope Francis' URBI ET ORBI Blessing during the early stages of the pandemic he spoke to us of the light that comes from hope: hope in God's love and care for us, hope in God amid the fragility and vulnerability of our lives. Hope takes us beyond human optimism, and places us on a path forward with God as our Guide, Shepherd and Strength. The Word of God calls us to hope, trusting that ours is a "living God". We have to be open to what the new life will mean for us.

**Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, OSB**  
**San Anselmo**  
**Rome, Italy**

*"Hope in God's love and care for us, hope in God amid the fragility and vulnerability of our lives. Hope takes us beyond human optimism, and places us on a path forward with God as our Guide, Shepherd and Strength."*

## AIM USA Annual Board Meeting

COVID-19 prevented the AIM USA Annual Board meeting from occurring in person, so everyone met by Zoom. AIM USA staff hosted the meeting on October 14, 2020 from their Erie office with the Board members joining from their respective monasteries. We missed the joy of an in person gathering, but still maintained relationships.



*Top row: Sr. Mary David Hydro, OSB, Holy Name Monastery, St. Leo, FL; Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; Sr. Christine Kosin, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; Sr. Nancy Miller, OSB, Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND; Fr. Joel Macul, OSB, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, NE.*

*Middle row: Sr. Michael Marie Rottinghaus, OSB, Immaculata Monastery, Norfolk, NE; Sr. Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; Mo. Maureen McCabe, OCSO, Mt. St. Mary's Monastery, Wrentham, MA; Sr. Anne Shepard, OSB, Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, KS*

*Bottom Row: Fr. Stan Gumula, OCSO, Mepkin Abbey, Ecuador; and Br. Paul Richards, OSB, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN (on phone)*



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## Birthing Hope in Prayer



*Benedict saw the entire world in a single ray of light. (Dialogues)*

***“My strength has failed me;  
do not abandon me, O God!”***

(Ps. 71:9)

This line of the psalmist is something all of us could and perhaps, have said, as the COVID-19 pandemic has raged on. There has been unimaginable suffering, losses and devastation in every region of the world. Our brother and sister monastics have shared their personal experiences, their challenges.

As I read and re-read their stories, their experiences, I realized there was a common theme. Everyone had hope, everyone trusted in God, everyone prayed, everyone valued community in new and deeper ways.

From their commitment to prayer, I think different words of the psalmist and scripture were ringing true, perhaps: “Turn to me and be safe; for I am God, there is no other (Is 45:22)”

or “Do not fear; I am with you. Do not be anxious, I am your God. (Is 41:10)”.

As I reflect on our nine months facing COVID-19, I also think of Mary’s nine month journey as she prepared for the birth of Jesus. Totally unexpected; she faced uncertainty and challenges. She was uprooted. It was a time of darkness, chaos and political uncertainty. Yet she held onto her belief in God, knowing that God was with her and would see her through. Do we maintain the same belief? She held onto hope as she traveled to give birth to the Christ-Child. A birth in a stable welcomed by the simplest of society, the shepherds with their simple gifts and by the wise ones who followed the star – and their hearts.

Reflecting on our 9 month journey, can we say we share the hope of Mary, the shepherds and the wise ones?

*Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB*

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB, Executive Director, AIM USA  
[director@aim-usa.org](mailto:director@aim-usa.org)