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The United States Secretariat of the Alliance for International Monasticism

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*Blue Earth in her hands.*

*Birth of a new universe.*



# Blue Earth in her hands.

*AIM USA staff requested monasteries to share their experiences of climate change and their responses to it. All reflections from the monasteries have been edited by the AIM USA staff with the permission of the authors.*

## From Africa

### The Impact of Climate Change in Senegal



Photo credit: @Archive-Photo/Keur Moussa Abbey

The Abbey of Keur Moussa in Senegal, was founded by the Abbey of St. Pierre de Solesmes in 1963 in the area known as the Sahel. It is a region defined by a transitional desert climate and the Sudanian climate extending from Dakar to the Red Sea. In 60 years of presence, we have been able to appreciate the evolution of the climate and the damage caused by climate change.

In Senegal, some effects of climate change are the decrease of rainfall which had caused flooding during the rainy seasons, salinization of the land and water table, the increase of temperature, variations in the amount of precipitation and large fluctuations in the length of the growing season from year to year.

Agriculture, as an economic engine, is increasingly at risk. In concrete terms, the implications of climate change for agriculture and flooding are real here. They seriously compromise a pillar sector of the Senegalese economy and cause an acute food crisis. Agriculture mobilizes nearly 70% of the active population and is the main sector of employment. However, yields of millet are declining by 10 to 20% and sorghum and corn by 5 to 15% among cereals. Fruit production is also experiencing a decline in productivity leading to a chronic food and nutritional insecurity in the country.

#### Cover Photo Credit:

ID 119212300D

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We have experienced large variations in precipitation from year to year. We have observed that the fauna and flora that had surrounded us practically no longer exists except for the protected areas that we have nurtured. A greater proportion of the season's rainfall now comes in the form of thunderstorms, which causes floods in urban areas, soil erosion and the reduced ability of crops to utilize the rainfall fraction.

The water table has become deeper and, in some places, salty which makes many of the crops around the Abbey and the surrounding areas impossible to grow.

Many crops can't stand the temperature differences that cause harm to the health of the elderly, the children or chronically ill. We treat them with medicinal plants.



Photo credit: @Archive-Photo/Keur Moussa Abbey

The Abbey monks and others in our area are in the process of re-launching an agroecology training center. Our focal point is to protect our common home, preserve biodiversity, develop methods of farming that respect the environment. We are developing seminars that educate about reforestation, biodiversity, water management, botanical gardens and waste management.

Father Olivier-Marie SARR, OSB

# Birth of a new universe.

From the Philippines

## Laudato Si In Action

*Thank you, Pope Francis, for listening to the  
groaning of our common home,*

**MOTHER EARTH**  
our only home



I “saw and heard” this groaning of Mother Earth in the devastated mountains and seas in Mindanao, Philippines.

### All this devastation occurs in the name of Development.

Our lands appear like humans with peeled off skin  
and our seas look as if blood flows through them.

### In the name of Development

Our natural resources are destroyed  
Human relationships are shattered because profit is prioritized  
Environmentalists are being killed  
Volunteers are slapped with trumped up charges  
Indigenous peoples are driven away from their ancestral land,  
dissolving their cultures

## 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**  
**or use our PayPal account**

**<https://www.aim-usa.org>**



### Our response comes through the joint-working Group for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation:

We educate ourselves, mission partners, clientele, customers,  
We develop sustainable farms,  
We plant native trees in the countryside  
We patronize locally made products  
We simplify our life style  
We maintain a healthy diet  
We respond to disasters and calamities

We try healing our common home, and also our relationships  
with GOD, others, ourselves and the environment. Help us, God,  
to bring this good work to completion.

## Missionary Cooperative Program

Dioceses across the United States invite mission groups as part  
of the Missionary Cooperative Program, to speak in parishes to  
create mission awareness and to support our brothers and sisters  
in developing countries with monetary donations. In 2022 AIM  
USA was accepted in seven dioceses which included 14 parishes.

The Dioceses included were Camden, NJ. Chicago, IL.  
Cleveland, OH. Erie, PA. Manchester, NH. St. Cloud, MN and  
Syracuse, NY. Eight speakers presented the work of AIM USA  
and Benedictine life in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean  
and Eastern Europe.

We are most grateful to Sister Donald Corcoran, OSB Cam.,  
Brother Paul Richards, OSB, Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small,  
OSB, Sister Valerie Luckey, OSB, Father Aloysius Serasin, OSB,  
Sister Susan Quaintance, OSB, Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB and  
Sister Christine Kosin, OSB for their commitment to share the  
message of AIM USA in the parishes.



# Blue Earth in her hands.

## From Brazil

### Drought Prevails

Brazil is a country of large expanse. The effects of global warming are very complex. A large part of Brazilian territory has an extensive coastline and it is known that global warming is causing an intense degeneration process in the Antarctic. Consequently, the coastal cities have been suffering great changes due to the advance of sea water.

On the other hand, droughts are intensified in other regions of the country, especially in the northeastern part of Brazil. This has caused great suffering to its population, depriving them of necessary drinking water.

The first great drought that is known in northeastern Brazil occurred in 1710. It can be seen, therefore, that this is an old phenomenon that is dealt with even in the biblical text. The scenario generated by this scourge has served as the basis for many of our best texts. It is certain that the absence of water, added to the intensity of the sun generates suffering, devastation and sadness. All of creation suffers.

There are several causes. Some are natural, while others are the result of human actions. Unfortunately, history shows humans resort to practices that lead to the unbridled exploitation of nature which then leads to drought, desertification and global warming. Human's impact on the earth, which is, after all a living organism, is enormous. We live in times when political changes are decided with little ecological awareness. A clear example, here in Brazil, is the effect of deforestation on the largest tropical forest on the planet. We are warned daily about the dire consequences of these policies.

We are falling into the trap of exploiting our environmental resources on the assumption that the resources are inexhaustible. It is extremely important that we learn from the experiences of countries which have collapsed because of the destruction of resources. We urgently need to raise awareness. As Pope Francis tells us in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, humanity is called to become aware of the need for changes in our lifestyles, especially in production and consumption, to combat this global warming.

Sister Angela Nunes das Neves  
Mae de Deus Mosteiro, Goiana, Brazil

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our monastery, Monastery of the Transfiguration, is located in the city of Santa Rosa, in the southern region of Brazil, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Here we have closely followed and witnessed climate change and its serious consequences. Since 2020, the lack of rain has been punishing our region, especially harming farmers. In the year 2021, our monastery lost all the soy crop that had been sown, like so many farmers in the region. We also lost our small crop of raspberries that would have been used to make jams. We were able to mitigate the losses precisely because the community, concerned with seeking and promoting the use of renewable energies, had just installed several solar panels on our house. This generated a



Photo credit: Mosteiro da Transfiguração

*Consequence of drought in our soybean plantation – crop totally lost.*

huge decrease in electricity costs, allowing us to reinvest in the purchase of seeds and fertilizers for the new crop. As Pope Francis rightly stated in his Encyclical *Laudato Si*, “We can all collaborate, as instruments of God, in the care of creation, each one based on their culture, experience, initiatives and abilities.” Today is the day to engage in this challenge, or to take up a new breath to continue with full commitment in the construction of our common home, our planet.

Brother Agostinho E. B. Fagundes, OSB

### 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

# Birth of a new universe.

From India

## Floods Prevail

*I am writing this from Saint Joseph's Benedictine Monastery situated in the south-western state of India, Kerala, known as God's Own Country.*

Kerala enjoys a unique geographical area with serene climate, beautiful beaches, tranquil stretches of back-waters, lush hill stations and exotic wildlife. Kerala has nearly 600 kilometres of Arabian Sea shoreline and it is protected and blessed with the western edge of the Deccan plateau known as The Western Ghats, a range of mountains, running parallel to the coastline of the Arabian Sea. The Western Ghats is a biodiversity hot spot and a biologically rich region. It also plays a huge role in Kerala's monsoon weather pattern. The projected population of Kerala in 2022 is 35 million and is home to around 2.75% of India's population. Its population density is the fourth highest in the country.

Climate change is affecting Kerala in three ways: the rise of sea temperature, the changes of the monsoon patterns and increased cloudbursts, landslides, cyclones and floods.

Recent studies in climate change have shown that the sea level will increase slowly and the sea will begin to engulf the shores. Global warming is causing atmospheric and sea temperatures to rise sharply, which will cause more low pressure to form in the atmosphere, turning into hurricanes. By 2030, it is predicted, that many of the coastal places in Kerala will be submerged in water. The



Photo credit: Vatican City

into rivers and lowlands, have advanced to the point where whole communities have had to relocate. Climate change can affect our health, our ability to grow food, housing, safety and work.

Kerala has a tropical climate with high annual rainfall caused by monsoon rain patterns. The majority of its annual rainfall, almost 80%, occurs during the southwest summer monsoon season. The average annual rainfall in Kerala is around 118 inches. Monsoon rainfall is not just a weather phenomenon—it is a key driver of the economy. Agriculture depends heavily on monsoon rainfall for irrigation. One of the major impacts of changes in the tracking of monsoon systems can be seen particularly on rice production. The uneven distribution of rain may impact the quality of the grain as well as its nutritional value. Very high temperatures induce heat stress and affect plants, leading to sterility and reduced grain quality. The supply of drinking water and the generation of electricity are also linked to the monsoons.

Another phenomenon we face is cloudbursts which have triggered landslides. The damage they caused to trees, plants, and crops, as well as the loss of arable land and livestock are immense. In hilly areas, sometimes saturated clouds ready to condense into rain cannot produce rain, due to the upward movement of the very warm current of air. This leads to flash floods, landslides, housing collapse, and most importantly human casualties on a large scale. The 2020 flood in Kerala marked the third year in a row of severe monsoon flooding which caused loss of human lives, livestock and agriculture and damage to property.

In addition, global warming causes illegal quarrying, deforestation, land encroachment and changes in farming practices, and an increase in the risk of landslides.

India's new climate commitments include two primary targets for 2030. One is to reduce emissions by 45%, relative to the year 2005 and the other is to increase "non-fossil" electricity, solar, wind, nuclear and hydropower, to half of the country's electricity capacity.

Father Shajan Mathew, OSB



Photo credit: Reuters

rainfall is expected to increase by 6-8% in the Western Ghats and western coastal areas. This rise in temperature in 40 years has huge consequences in the form of increased frequency of deep clouds, even during monsoons, leading to very heavy to extreme rainfall and cloud-burst type events. The frequency of severe typhoons (cyclones) is increased as well as cloud bursts, landslides and floods in Kerala. These conditions, like sea-level rise and saltwater intrusion



# Blue Earth in her hands.

## Miracles from Ukraine

In our last newsletter, we presented the Benedictine Sisters in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, and their situation in the war. Recently, Sister Lynn McKenzie, OSB, President of CIB Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum, a Benedictine women's group, had a zoom conversation with Mother Klara from Ukraine. What follows are her insights from these past seven months.

When the war broke out, the sisters here in Zhytomyr were hearing bombs very near to the monastery. We had to take shelter in the basement. As the bombings increased the sisters and twenty guests had to move up and down the steps again and again. Our elderly sisters couldn't cope with the tension and the physical demand of constantly returning to the basement. I gave them a choice to stay where they were or go to the basement. As it became more dangerous, I made the decision to have the elderly go to our monastery in Lviv. The trip was very difficult but it brought them closer to the Polish border which was safer. As it became more dangerous all of us went to Lviv.

The support and sympathy that we received from the large Benedictine family across the world gave us the courage and strength to go to Lviv. We lived with the conviction that we were not alone. We received word from Benedictines all over the world even in places we did not know. We are very grateful to be part of the world-wide Benedictine family and are in communion with all Benedictines.

There were 150 refugees in the monastery at Lviv, taking over the entire place, even our cloister. Everyone was given a duty, a task, to make them feel that they were in a normal situation and helping each other.

There was a great blessing for us living with the refugees. We became aware that we were much better off than these refugees who lost everything--their homes and belongings. We also felt the support and generosity of so many people and knew that we had to pass that support on to others. We realized that even in the midst of war, there is a lot of goodness around us. This thinking made us behave in a different way. Serving the refugees made us forget ourselves and helped to change our attitudes. We realized that there was a greater good behind what is going on around us.

Miracles happened in our monastery. Many persons who were with us were non-believers. They would hear us singing the Liturgy of the Hours and they would ask if they could sit with us. They did not understand the language (Latin) but they experienced calm and peace.

One elderly man who was with us for two months, attended prayer daily, listened to the scriptures and said the rosary. He asked to go to confession and receive communion. Eight days later he died of a heart attack while at prayer with us.

We realized more deeply that the way we live is a source of healing. The structure and order in our life is also very important



Photo credit: Mother Klara Swiderska

*A beautiful rainbow emerges over the city of Zhytomyr, Ukraine.*

for others. One family fleeing from their burning home, walking past dead bodies said that having lived with the sisters, they are healing. It is good to share this Benedictine life with others.

Our community has returned to Zhytomyr even though we are still under fire. Because of the danger we cannot take in refugees but we are attending to the needs of the people around us.

In Lviv the sisters have 54 people living with them. The refugees have their own space and kitchen as they try to live a normal life. Children are attending school and parents are going out to work. The sisters are taking in short-term guests and those who have nowhere else to go.

We are so grateful for your prayer and financial help. We are one in this large Benedictine family.

***IF YOU WISH TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT THE SISTERS AND PEOPLE OF UKRAINE, please know that all money we receive will be sent to them directly.***

# Birth of a new universe.

## Board Meeting

The annual Board meeting of AIM USA was held on September 7, 2022, at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA. Members of the Board attended in person and virtually. Each Board member brings a special talent that fulfills a specific need of AIM USA. Their individual commitment and experience of the missions, their financial and technological acumen and their past and present experience of leadership in monastic communities offer a host of strength and support to the AIM USA staff.

The board received written reports prior to the meeting outlining the work accomplished during the past year. They were informed that 25 monasteries received direct aid to fund covid relief, education and formation programs, building construction and repairs and sponsorship of regional meetings.

The cultural services aspect of the program funded monasteries subscriptions for formation materials (magazines, periodicals and video resources). In addition, over 100 boxes of books were shipped to monasteries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Mass stipends were distributed to monasteries across the world.

In addition, monasteries and their oblates were very generous and afforded AIM USA to make substantial contributions to monasteries in Ukraine and Poland.



Photo credit: Contributed photo

*Present were (standing, left to right) Mariana Olivo Espinosa, OSB, Pan de Vida Monastery, Torreon, Mexico; Anne Shepard, OSB, Mount Saint Scholastica, Atchison, KS; Joel Macul, OSB, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, NE; Ann Hoffman, OSB, AIM-USA Executive Director. Seated, Nettie Gamble, OCSO, Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey, Dubuque, IA; Christine Kosin, OSB, AIM-USA staff, and Michael Marie Rottinghaus, OSB, Immaculata Monastery, Norfolk, NE.*

*On the screen (clockwise) Susan Quaintance, OSB, Saint Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, IL; Stan Gumula, OCSO, Monasterio Santa Maria de la Esperanza, Esmeraldas, Ecuador; Macario Martinez, OSB, Benet Lake Abbey, Benet Lake, WI; and Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, PA.*

*Board member Paul Richards, OSB, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN, was unable to attend.*

## Grants funded November 2021 to October 2022

### Africa

**Chad** – education for two sisters to study  
**Congo** – education for a sister and two monks  
**Tanzania** – an avocado plantation for a women's community  
**Tanzania** – a joint meeting of the Benedictine Union of Tanzania (BUT)  
**South Africa** – a joint meeting of BECOSA  
**Nigeria** – a host-making machine for a women's community  
**Tanzania** – a water project for a women's community

### Asia

**India** – an educational program for girls  
**Philippines** – building repair for a women's community  
**Vietnam** – Covid Relief for 100 families  
**Vietnam** – Covid Vaccine for a women's community  
**Philippines** – a sister to attend a leadership course in Rome

### Latin America

**Haiti** – building construction for a men's community  
**Peru** – a bakery for a men's community  
**Mexico** – for a nun in Coyoacan to study  
**Latin America** – funds for a joint meeting of monastic men & women in Latin America  
**Brazil** – funds for a monk to travel for study

### Eastern Europe

**Poland** – funds for a monk to study in Jerusalem



United States Secretariat—Alliance for International Monasticism

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

As we prepared this newsletter, we tried to decide what to use as the cover. In our searching, we stumbled upon the photo by Dmytro Tolokonoy, a photographer from Ukraine. It seems perfect.

Mary who said “yes”, who gave birth to the Christ child, the Son of God, watches over us, holding the world in her hands.

***What does she see as she looks at this world today?***

**A world in crisis.** Villages and cities are under water. Others have no water. She remembers when her Son thirsted.

**Migrants from Africa seeking safety as their land literally disappears from rising sea levels are stranded on “charity boats” – no one will welcome them.** She remembers her experience of rejection as she prepared to give birth.

**The indigenous in the Amazon of Brazil who live simple lives attempt to steward and protect the forests.** Now she sees the murder of indigenous by those seeking financial

gain. The forests are dying. The indigenous are dying. Our life breath is dying.

She remembers and reminds us that as her Son was dying on the cross for us they cast lots for his clothes.

She tells us that, if we choose, we can birth a new universe.

The choice is here.

The call is here to accept it, to commit to it with the help of God.

*Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB*

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB, Executive Director, AIM USA  
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