
aim usa

The United States Secretariat of the Alliance for International Monasticism

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*Proclaim Glad Tidings
to the Poor*



Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

AIM USA staff requested monasteries to share their experiences with the poor. All reflections from the monasteries have been edited by the AIM USA staff with the permission of the authors. Their responses follow.

From Ecuador

Photo credit: Monasterio Santa Maria de la Esperanza



One of our sisters received a visit from her sister with her little daughter. At the third meeting the little girl exclaimed, “My aunt is poor!!!! Always with those same clothes, can we buy her clothes, mom?”

Our Community lives surrounded by sisters and brothers in real poverty, not only physically, but also spiritually. As our Bishop Emeritus used to say: “Esmeraldas is the last bone in the monkey’s tail”. It is a black and marginalized people. Added to this is the influx of immigrants. As a border town with Colombia, Colombians fleeing from violence arrive here, while Venezuelans come trying to escape the difficult situation in their country. All this reality reminds us of the world of poverty that surrounds us.

We, too, are an economically poor community. Although God blesses us with vocations, we currently number 36, our economy is weak; and, as our neighbors say, “we do not make ends meet”. But, from the beginning of the pandemic, we found it miraculous that many people helped us with money and food, so that we were able to share what they gave us with others. We gave food to families and neighborhoods and we also made a commitment to some very poor areas in the South of Quito.

Our Hospice is always open to those who need a word, a piece of advice, an expression of tenderness. And we have the joy of constantly receiving from them the testimony that they have found peace and that they leave happy.

As Thomas Merton tells us, “the monastic is the universal brother/sister” and the poor always help us to “tune into the frequency of God and the Gospel”. Here in Esmeraldas we have this gift permanently.

Mother Celia Quezada Santos, OCSO
Monasterio Santa Maria De La Esperanza
Esmeraldas, Ecuador

From Dominican Republic



Photo credit: Cistercian Monastery of Santa Maria del Evangelio

At the beginning of this pandemic, our monastery seemed to be suspended in time. Although the monastic rhythm of life continued as normal, we felt an emptiness. Our guests were not there. Following the norms and protocols of the Ministry of Health we closed our guest house and the doors of our Church. Our Eucharists were only communal and we did not have the warm company of our parishioners.

We began to miss the well-established contact with the people. Our economic condition was affected by the limited access of many benefactors to our facilities, however, friends, relatives, benefactors and other religious houses made economic contributions and food. Nothing was lacking.

During the time of lockdown, many were forced to stay in their homes because of the curfew. They tell us, they thought of us and said to themselves: “let’s pray like monks”. In their anecdotes of “cloister” they tell us how it helped them to rely on the psalms and the prayerful reading of the Word.

We thank the Lord, because from our humble condition and simplicity of living the gospel, others have been able to have a close encounter with God in moments perhaps where they could have fallen into depression or loneliness.

We stop to think about how time has changed from March 2020 to today. We cry out with Psalm 106: Give thanks to the Lord for mercy, for the wonders God works with all people.

Community of the Cistercian Monastery
of Santa María del Evangelio
Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic

Missionary Cooperative Program

AIM USA was accepted by 10 dioceses. Seven appeals were given: in the diocese of Camden, NJ by Sr. Philomena Fleck, OSB, Cincinnati, OH by Sr. Marian Wehler, OSB and Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB; Sr. Christine Kosin, OSB spoke in Cleveland, OH, Fr. Anselm Smedile, OSB in Manchester, NH, Fr. Paul Weckert, OSB gave the appeal in Seattle, WA, in St. Paul, MN by Sr. Mary White, OSB and Br. Paul Richards, OSB, and Syracuse, NY by Sr. Donald Corcoran, OSB. Additionally, three dioceses requested a video for the website or resources for distribution.

We are grateful to these monastics for their commitment and the dioceses and parishioners who welcome and support AIM USA.

Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

From Namibia

The St. Benedict Priory House Community of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Windhoek, Namibia plans to share our Christmas joy with the poor families in the squatter areas or nearby locations and those who are selling grass, beans and pods on the road. We shall visit families in Okahandja Park and One Nation locations and greet them by singing Christmas carols, praying with them and giving them packed groceries and second-hand clothes from our benefactors. There are times when the Supermarkets call up one of our Sisters to pick up the unsold food and she distributes this food to the poor people on the road.



Photo credit: St. Benedict Priory House

We will also prepare packed sweets and biscuits for the children who attend the Christmas morning Mass in our chapel. Hopefully the government will allow us to gather.

The St. Joseph's Women Empowerment Center in Okatunda at One Nation is an outreach of Soweto Parish in Katutura, Windhoek. The aim of this Center is to empower women to become self-reliant. Our Windhoek Priory is open to help the needs of this Center. In the past, the Center staff headed by our Sr. Eveline Nekongo, OSB bought toothbrushes, face towels, plastic sunglasses, sweets, chips and small packs of juice for 20 children at Christmastime.

Some of our Junior Sisters, Novices, Postulants and Aspirants will

make charcoal papers from our scratched papers, old newspapers and magazines. The papers are first shredded or cut into small pieces and placed in water. The papers are then formed into paper balls and heated under the sun until they are hard and dry. They become hard charcoal balls for boiling water and cooking. These will save the families from buying wood.

If the pandemic continues, we shall still share our glad tidings of gifts with the poor even if we just have to deliver them to the families.

Sister Remedios de los Reyes, OSB
St. Benedict Priory House
Windhoek, Namibia

From Nigeria

We the Benedictine Word Incarnate Presentation Monastery Nuns, have concern in bringing glad tidings to the poor. St. Benedict commands "great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims because in them more particularly Christ is received..." (Chapter 53 R/B).

The people at our door are spiritually and materially poor. Their spiritual poverty is much greater than their physical poverty. Many are suffering terrible loneliness, emptiness and are illiterate. A good number of them feel unloved and unwanted. They know they need something yet they don't know what it is. What they are missing really is a living relationship with God.

In response we conduct directed retreats and counselling to those who come to our monastery. Sometimes we offer them material goods if needed.

Some are poor due to climate change. Kogi State is an agrarian



Photo credit: Presentation Monastery

state with arable land suitable for cash crops (especially cassava). Many families are engaged in subsistence farming where they grow crops for their families. Climate change has brought increased temperatures and variable rainfall which can lead to a drought or a flood. It threatens the agriculture immensely.

Some people have great fear from the Fulani herds men (a Muslim militant group) who are responsible for hundreds of Christians' deaths and the burning of homes in villages..

Our Monastery responds through ardent prayers, charitable works, spiritual direction and moral instruction and above all by living according to the Gospel of Christ and the Rule of Holy Father St. Benedict. In doing so we bring glad tidings to the poor.

Sister Eberechukwu Emeagwara, OSB
Word Incarnate Presentation Monastery
Nigeria, W. Africa

Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

From United States

Aging has made “bringing glad tidings to the poor” rather difficult for most of us. The last several years of our communal discernment has focused on how to best care for our aging sisters and the most prudent ways to maximize our human and material resources.

*Strangers meet on common ground.
Life is experienced. Souls are nourished.*

“You must relieve the lot of the poor.” Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else.” RB 4:14-21

The pandemic created an opportunity to “act differently than the rest of the world” as we sought care for ourselves. So, we set out to create a setting where people of all ages and stages of life, can flourish in an intergenerational and synergistic community. We let go of our lived experience as a monastic community to explore how we could live as “one among” by opening wide the doors of our monastery. We designed a community of care where we could enculturate Benedictine values for residents, families, and staff. We knew from our own experiences that “bringing glad tidings to others,” could effectively eliminate the loneliness, boredom, and isolation so often associated with senior care.

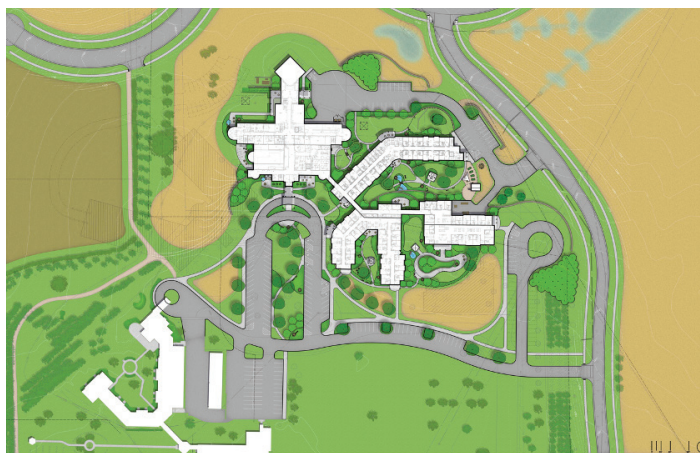


Photo credit: Mother of God Monastery

In October of 2021, we will break ground on a new senior care facility where our monastery is remodeled and added on to, creating 130,000 square feet of living and common space, allowing sisters and laity to be cared for under the same roof where all are welcomed as Christ, where strangers meet on common ground, life is experienced, and souls are nourished by prayer, beauty, and wellness.

Sister Theresa Hoffman, OSB
Mother of God Monastery
Watertown, SD USA

ON THE COVER

The children of Namibia receive Christmas gifts, Windhoek Priory, Namibia.

From Canada



Photo credit: Our Lady of Calvary Abbey

“The spirit is upon me, to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4: 14-22, Isaiah 61: 1-2.) St. Lawrence taught us that the poor, crippled, blind, and suffering people “are the true treasures of the Church.” “Blessed are the generous, for they will see many smiling faces”. In our community, we are privileged to assist other persons, organizations, Christian or non-Christian.

We have given work to people at a time when we did not really need to employ anyone anymore. We have helped people with their housing bills, either because they were facing eviction or when they have had no money to pay for their apartments etc. Sometimes even retreatants do not have money to pay for their room and board but have stayed and shared in our monastic prayer. It takes a lot of humility for someone to approach us and ask for assistance in cash or kind, and that is enough.

We contribute money to the food banks around here. Food banks are places setup in localities with the capacity to distribute a lot of grocery/food products every year to the poor and needy for free. We’ve helped with medical bills, support for cancer patients and other associations, the police, crime prevention associations, and other NGO’s.

We have assisted some parishes facing heating costs during the winter season to keep their places of worship open. We have helped other monasteries and religious orders and congregations directly over the years. Since our foundation in 1902 we have been helped greatly in the past by other monasteries when we were in dire financial situation. We do not want to give only what we do not need. If we could give from our poverty, it will be more biblical and characteristic of Christian love which is Charity. There are other Church organizations not mentioned here that we support yearly.

Abbot Innocent Ugyeh, OCSO
Our Lady of Calvary Abbey
Rogersville, NB CANADA

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

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

Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

From Canada



Photo credit: St. Peter's Abbey

The monks of St. Peter's Abbey have responded to the changing needs of their neighbors throughout their 120-year history. The first monks accompanied land developers from Minnesota in 1902 to scout for suitable land for settlers in unsettled parts of Canada. They settled on rich farmland on Treaty 6 territory in central Saskatchewan, near the city of Saskatoon.

The first priority was to provide pastors for the new settlers. By 1911 the monastic community became an abbey and in 1921 an *abbey nullius*, which made the abbot the "ordinary" of the surrounding parishes.

An oasis of peace where guest and writers are welcomed.

In 1904 the monks began publishing a weekly German newspaper, *St. Peter's Bote*, to provide news for the settlers. Twenty years later, an English newspaper, *The Prairie Messenger*, was added as a weekly. Because of evolving changes, it closed in 2018.

The settlers needed a high school to educate their children and in 1921 the monks opened St. Peter's College, a boarding school for boys. This enabled farm children to get an advanced education and enabled them to become professional doctors and lawyers and business people. St. Peter's also became a center of culture.

During the 1930s, the St. Peter's farm raised good quality hogs and cattle as a model for neighboring farmers. In conjunction with the University of Saskatchewan, the monks sponsored field days to demonstrate new methods of agriculture.

In 1967, St. Peter's Abbey sent two monks to operate a parish in Maceio, Brazil. This was in response to Pope John XXIII's appeal for pastors in Latin America. Maceio is one of the poorest areas in northeast Brazil.

As some apostolates closed over the last decade or two, two are now dominant: St. Peter's College offers scholarships and bursaries to needy students and St. Peter's Abbey has transformed its residences into a guest residence for people making a retreat, taking a break or joining the monks in prayer.

St. Peter's is appreciated as an oasis of peace where guests and writers are welcomed to take a breath in their busy lives.

Abbot Peter Novocosky, OSB
St. Peter's Abbey
Saskatchewan, Canada

From United States

We Ferdinand Benedictines strive to offer each person the dignity of being recognized as a beloved child of God... or as St. Benedict would say, we receive each person as if we were receiving Christ himself.

We remember those whose poverty is hidden and unreachable.

Several of our sisters offer direct services to the poor. Sr. Mary Frances Schafer works as director of community coordination for the Coalition of the Homeless in Louisville, Kentucky, assisting various direct-service agencies to offer better and more cohesive services across the community. A major part of that work entails securing grant money from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help people move into permanent housing.

Likewise, Sr. Jane Michele McClure serves as major gifts officer for Habitat for Humanity in Evansville, Indiana. That may sound like a job behind a desk, but Sr. Jane Michele takes a personal interest in those served by Habitat and celebrates with them when they move into their new homes. Also in Evansville, Sr. Donna Marie Herr attends to the needs of those who come to the St. Vincent de Paul food bank, offering them food and other needed supplies.



Photo credit: Monastery Immaculate Conception

At the monastery, Sr. Joan Scheller works with immigrants as director of our Latino Outreach and Immigration Services. She offers low-cost immigration services and strives to provide for individuals' spiritual needs in addition to their immigration needs.

These are some of the specific ways our community currently attends to those in need. During the height of the pandemic, our monastery bakery provided bread to a local food bank, and within the past year, we established a Blessing Cabinet, stocked with food and household items for our co-workers to take if they are in need or if they know of a friend, family member, or neighbor who is in need.

Wherever we serve we hope that everyone receives the glad tidings of being treated with dignity, respect, and care, and recognized as a beloved child of God, the image of Christ.

Sister Anita Louise, OSB
Monastery Immaculate Conception
Ferdinand, IN USA

Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

From Cameroon

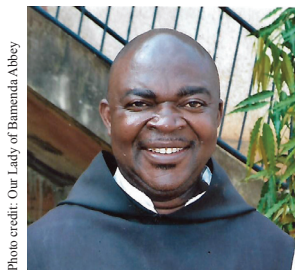


Photo credit: Our Lady of Bamenda Abbey

Brother Polycarp, OCSO

OUR LADY OF BAMENDA ABBEY, Cistercian Monastery Mbengwi was founded in 1963 from Mount St Bernard Abbey Leicester, England. Mbengwi is a small town about twenty-five kilometers from Bamenda City, one of the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. Since its foundation the monastery has always been of home to countless persons who come from far and near to seek spiritual nourishment, health facilities, material assistance, knowledge and security. The doors of the Monastery of Mbengwi are open to people from all origins and fields of life, irrespective of their religions, nationalities, tribes or language.

These persons, like anyone in need, are all considered poor. Their situation is principally caused by the socio-political situation of the country that does not give room for equal chances to succeed in life.

Principally we provide presence alongside hospitality, prayer and advocacy, encouragement and beauty expressed in the landscape that surrounds the monastery. Religious men or women come for their retreats or to seek a quiet environment to recollect themselves or prepare for an event. Others come for health reasons, consult and receive treatment for their different health problems from our herbal pharmacy. Some jobless persons come to seek job opportunities and are temporarily employed by us to clean the farms.

The activities of the monastery have been greatly affected by the ongoing civil war in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, and since last year Covid 19 has come to make worse the already deplorable situation. The monastery is very often inaccessible because of road blockages and frequent lock-downs that prevent many people from coming to the monastery. Under this strain of the crisis the monastery is barely surviving. Counting on Divine providence, the brothers still open their hearts and doors to the poor and the needy, while hoping for better days.

Brother Polycarp, OCSO
Our Lady of Bamenda Abbey
Cameroon

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Send to: 345 East 9 St. Erie, PA 16503
or use our PayPal account
(www.aim-usa.org)

From Macau

We are aware that the Holy Spirit is guiding us to bring “good tidings” to the poor because we receive so many “good tidings” from many generous people. Macau is a small, very wealthy society. The Catholics are a minority but devoted and charitable.

This great generosity is a gift and a challenge for us. A challenge and reminder to live constantly in “giving” our life daily to God through the Liturgy and the community life, praying for all of humanity, and also to reach out to the real poor.

It is not easy for us in Macau to find the economically poor. It seems that all people have more than necessary to live. Some groups do serve the poor directly. We have safe channels of outreach through the Missionaries of Charity, who know and serve daily the poorest of the poor. We support the Filipino Pastoral Center of the Trinitarian Fathers, a service for the migrant workers. and the Good Shepherd Sisters who are helping many women in various needs.



Photo credit: Our Lady Star of Hope Monastery

During these past 2 years of pandemic, the poor were and still are the migrant workers (Filipino, Indonesian, Indian, Vietnamese). Since February 2020 many of them have lost jobs, housing and hope. Because of the COVID restrictions, the borders are closed and no tourists can enter Macau except from Mainland China.

We carry the spiritually poor in our daily prayer and self-offering. We remember those whose poverty is hidden and unreachable by human aid also the rich and powerful whose lives are empty, with no faith, no love and no meaning.

Sister Catarina Mazzarelli, OCSO
Our Lady Star of Hope Trappistine Community
Macau

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Proclaim Glad Tidings to the Poor

From United States

**Let us receive your mercy, O God,
In the midst of your people.
Pour your mercy on us.
Pour your mercy on us.**

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The words of this song invite God's presence to open our hearts in an outpouring of mercy among us.

In the midst of God's people we too live in a challenging time of a pandemic, the unrest of racial injustice, economic insecurity, ecological trauma, and all the deluge of grief and crippling news that affect our daily lives. Our monastic life offers a pathway to respond by emptying our distracted and preoccupied hearts to receive God's Word of mercy with hope-filled imagination. Accepting our own fragility and vulnerability enables us to perceive that we are one with the poor and marginalized. Listening to the "little ones" of our society and world, we humbly recognize our own poverty. Through them we become gifted to realize a new vision for our lives, our earth and all its peoples. We have to acknowledge: were not many of our ancestors and even our own grandparents/parents wayfarers, impoverished immigrants, who in fear yet in hope, crossed over to another shore? We all share their same flesh and blood. We do not maintain a privileged distance from others but humbly find our own selves in the refugee, the prisoner, the homeless and hungry, the stranger and the many others struggling today in our society and world. We are part of them and they live in us. They are our brothers and sisters in the flesh. They reflect the face of God living among us. Our monastic hospitality begins by opening our hearts to create a space for God's peace and mercy to birth new life born in a union of love for others.

Our community tries to give space through our common prayer; through creation's beauty of our surrounding grounds and forest land; through the welcome to receive everyone, and through offering spaces for individuals and groups to find "rest" and renew their



Photo credit: Weston Priory

mission of service to others. People daily drive by the monastery and stop in their cars or trucks just for a few moments of quiet and peace to begin or end their day. Others come to our monastery from their ministries and hospitality to those leaving prison. We welcome AA and Al Anon meetings, many of whom join us for times of prayer before or after their meeting. We are touched by those who reach out to us as they daily work in foodbanks, offer medical and fuel assistance; ministering in child care centers and youth shelters; accompanying the elderly and in special service to the homeless, isolated and dispossessed. Together with our Mexican Benedictine Sisters at their retreat and hospitality center in Cuernavaca, Mexico, we offer persons from our own country the opportunity to connect with the peoples of Mexico and Central America through growth in genuine friendship and mutual understanding. A Guatemalan family fleeing persecution in their homeland were welcomed to our monastery and lived with us for many years. Our relationship with them has enabled us to walk in their shoes and know the plight of so many refugees pleading with us to be received today as our sisters and brothers.

Through this small practice we creatively grow together to become more human. Our *lectio* becomes flesh as a communion of mercy and care in the likeness of God's own *kenosis*.

Benedictine Monks of Weston Priory
Weston, VT USA

AIM USA Annual Board Meeting

The AIM USA Board met by Zoom on October 13, 2021, to review the year and discuss future plans.



Photo credit: AIM USA

Top row: Sr. Nettie Gamble, OCSO, Our Lady of Mississippi Abbey, Dubuque, IA; Sr. Christine Kosin, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; Fr. Joel Macul, OSB, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, NE; Sr. Susan Quaintance, OSB, St. Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, IL.

Middle row: Fr. Stan Gumula, OCSO, Mepkin Abbey, Ecuador; Sr. Mariana Olivo, OSB, Pan de Vida Monastery, Torreon, Mexico; Sr. Michael Marie Rottinghaus, OSB, Immaculata Monastery, Norfolk, NE; Sr. Anne Shepard, OSB, Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, KS.

Bottom row: Sr. Nancy Miller, OSB, Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND; Sr. Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA. (Missing: Br. Paul Richards, OSB; St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN.)



United States Secretariat—Alliance for International Monasticism

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

Imagine

There's no one hungry, no one homeless
A world of plenty for all.

Imagine

A world without conflict
A world united all as one

Imagine

There's no division
All are seen, welcomed, and have a voice

Imagine

All creation
Abounding with life

Imagine

All the people
Caring for each other

Say it's impossible?

It's already begun

Imagine joining us today

As we imagine, dream, and share glad tidings.
These are the Glad Tidings. They are already being lived out
in our midst.

Our sister and brother monastics shared ways in which they are
living the Glad Tidings, how they imagine the world can be different.

It begins with one person and one community who sees; one person and one community who recognizes a need; one person and one community who listens to the voice of God and acts.

And so, the hungry are fed, and seen as people. They have a name, a face. Now we must work to find ways so there will be no hungry or homeless. We need to work for systemic changes that allow all people – no matter the race, ethnicity, or country to have the basic human rights.

We need to listen to the climate experts and climate activists, such as Greta Thunberg, and change our ways of living if we are to save Mother Earth, to save the creatures of the earth and sea, to save human life.

Be peacemakers, building individual and global relationships. Be peacemakers, working and listening to one another. Be peacemakers, bringing an end to violent conflicts by listening to one another. Be peacemakers, seeing each person as a “child of God”.

It **IS** possible.

Each of us **MAKES** a difference.

Each of us **PROCLAIMS** the Glad Tidings.

Each of us **RECEIVES** the Glad Tidings.

Let there be peace on earth!

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB, Executive Director, AIM USA
director@aim-usa.org