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*Gyrovagi*

Gyrovagi: An occasional newsletter from the President of the Federation of St. Scholastica

Spring 2020

## Inside this issue:

|   |      |
|---|------|
| * In the Time of Covid 19               | 1, 2 |
| Interim Norm Adopted                    | 2    |
| * Critical Junctures                    | 3, 4 |
| * Actions taken                         | 5    |
| * Centennial Planning                   | 6, 7 |
| * Synod for Pan Amazon                  | 7, 8 |
| * Being Benedictine in the 21st Century | 8    |
| * Federation Website New Resources      | 9    |
| * Kay Fitzgerald                        |      |
| * BCRI                                  | 10   |
| * President's Spain Trip                | 11   |
| * AIM International                     | 11   |
| * Prioresses to Presidents              | 13   |
| * Conference of Prioresses              | 14   |



S. Lynn McKenzie, OSB  
Federation President

## In the time of COVID 19

This is a serious time – it is about faith not fear, prayer not panic, love not loss, trust not trepidation. Yet, all these things – fear, panic, loss, trepidation – are very human and expected in the current climate. So, we seek to hold our fears lightly and embrace the uncertainty and say, “Yes, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”

It is an amazing thing to know that the whole world is caught up in the Paschal Mystery, and that all Benedictines and, indeed many more besides, are united in prayer for our hurting and frightened world. We pray especially for health care workers on the front lines caring for those with COVID-19, putting their own lives and their families at risk. We pray for all those assisting in any way – including truckers who bring much needed supplies, grocery stores and pharmacies remaining open to provide necessities for us, the national guard who are bringing food to vulnerable people, parents making their best efforts to teach their children at home and school teachers doing all they can to teach from afar through the wonderful world of the internet, and all leaders who are doing their best to make decisions daily and hourly with the best information they have.



I am especially mindful of our prioresses and their councils who are setting a tone of calm and peace and faith, who encourage us to pray and be faithful to our vocation, and who make difficult decisions about what is the next best step to keep our communities safe and to do our part in trying to stop the spread of the virus. Many of us are fasting from the Eucharist, longing\*\* for the time when we will once again be able to celebrate the Eucharist as we are accustomed. May we never forget this longing, this yearning, this deep desire in us to be one with Jesus and the entire Body of Christ.

## Postponement of Elections in our Federation

What is the practical impact of the precautions with coronavirus on the operations of the federation? Fortunately, much of my work outside of travel is done by phone and email as well as video conference calls. I think it is much easier to be president in these days when technology enables communications with relative ease. But there is much travel required with this work, not only for me but also for election discernment facilitators and visitors. Fortunately, we got through visitations before the end of the 2019. But we do have five elections currently scheduled this year:

April 23-26, 2020 Holy Name Monastery, St. Leo, FL

May 14-17, 2020 Emmanuel Monastery, Baltimore, MD

May 22-25, 2020 Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA

May 28-31, 2020 St. Walburga Monastery, Elizabeth, NJ

Aug 2-6, 2020 Pan de Vida Monastery, Torreón, Coahuila (visitation and election).

## In the Time of COVID 19 (Con't)

In light of the likelihood of the coronavirus precautions preventing travel at, at least, some of these times, your federation council met (virtually, of course, thanks to the wonderful Zoom video conferencing platform that we have been using for over five years in our federation) to try to have a plan in place in the event of the need to postpone an election, thereby possibly causing a prioress to have to remain in office beyond her term of office.

### Federation Council adopts interim norm to fill lacuna in Call to Life

The lack of any provision in our norms for this unlikely event of the need to postpone an election is what Call to Life Glossary refers to as a *lacuna* (defined as "any gap, or lack of provision"). The way to fill such a *lacuna* is found in Specific Norm 68 of Call to Life which states as follows:

*The federation president, with the consenting vote of the federation council, may provide a temporary solution for lacunae in the norms of Call to Life. She shall report her action to the next federation pre-chapter or chapter. Recommendations for new norms to cover such situations are to be considered at the next federation chapter.*

The federation council unanimously approved the following norm to fill this *lacuna* which will be in effect immediately and until the next federation chapter which will be held in 2022:

*For a grave reason, the president, with the consent of her council and after consulting with the monastery, may postpone the election of a prioress and extend her term but not for more than one year.*

We will be making these decisions on a case by case basis in consultation with each monastery affected. At the time of this writing, the election at the monastery in St. Leo, Florida has already been postponed to an uncertain date. Because future travel is still unknown, it is best to wait until we know more to re-schedule.

\*\*Published in LCWR reflection for the week of March 30, 2020:

### *Go to the Limits of Your Longing*

*God speaks to each of us as God makes us,  
Then walks with us silently out of the night.*

*These are the words we dimly hear:  
You, sent out beyond your recall,  
Go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.*

*Flare up like flame  
And make big shadows I can move in.*

*Let everything happen to you:  
beauty and terror.*

*Just keep going, No feeling is final  
Don't let yourself lose me.  
Nearby is the city they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.  
Give me your hand.*

-- Rainer Maria Rilke from Rilke's Book of Hours I, 59 p. 88



**2018 FSS General Chapter – DIRECTION STATEMENT 1 – CRITICAL JUNCTURES**

***We will assist communities in recognizing and navigating their critical junctures. This may include creative exploration of new ways of living monastic life.***



Because we are in a time of critical junctures in our communities, as acknowledged during our 2018 General Chapter (and as presented about so well by our 2017 Pre-Chapter speaker, Edith Bogue, OSB), the federation council wants to make sure all of our communities are aware of some important resources available for our study and use. Here I link four particularly important resources:

1. Guidelines for Modification or Suspension of Regular Governance in Autonomous Monasteries

<https://www.federationofsaintscholastica.org/resources-for-monasteries/>

2. National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) Tending the Vineyard program, which the USCCB website describes as: the NRRO presents five videos and accompanying support materials that offer tips, information, and methodologies for engaging in strategic property planning. Because our property must be evaluated as we grow smaller and older, this is a great resource for most of our communities to review.

<http://www.usccb.org/about/national-religious-retirement-office/tending-the-vineyard/index.cfm>

3. Closure Handbook – Procedures and Process of Dissolution of an Autonomous Monastery - published by the Federation of St. Gertrude in 2014 and generously shared with us by FSG President Sister Jeanne Weber. Thank you, Jeanne! A big shoutout to Sister Joella Kidwell for her good work of working on and providing online of this and other handbooks for our monastic life.

<https://www.federationofsaintscholastica.org/resources-for-monasteries/>

To show you the depth and breadth of this document and to entice you to go to our federation website and download the Handbook, inserted here is its detailed table of contents:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction .....   | 5  |
| Discernment regarding possible dissolution.....                  | 5  |
| Making a decision to close.....                                  | 8  |
| Public communication of the decision to close.....               | 9  |
| Personnel aspects of individual transfers                        |    |
| Identifying another monastery for transfer.....                  | 11 |
| When a Sister is not accepted.....                               | 12 |
| Moving to other communities.....                                 | 12 |
| Transferring official files.....                                 | 13 |
| Transfer of mentally incompetent member(s).....                  | 13 |
| Financial aspects:   |    |
| Social Security.....;  | 14 |
| Health insurance.....  | 15 |
| Medicaid.....  | 15 |
| Medicare D prescription drug coverage.....                       | 15 |
| Credit cards.....  | 16 |
| Assets: Investments/Annuities/Life insurance/Mineral rights..... | 16 |
| Consolidating banks accounts.....                                | 17 |
| Audits/reviews.....  | 17 |
| Managing finances for a Sister who does not transfer.....        | 17 |
| Income tax returns.....  | 18 |
| Quarterly payments for Sisters in residency.....                 | 18 |
| Transfer of patrimony/inheritance.....                           | 18 |
| Interim cost-of-living payments.....                             | 18 |

(Con't. Page 4)

(Con't. from Page 3)



|   |    |
|---|----|
| Business aspects:   |    |
| Inventory of property(s) and possessions.....                   | 19 |
| Real estate appraisal.....                                      | 19 |
| Land survey.....  | 20 |
| Disposition of property and possessions.....                    | 20 |
| Automobiles/vehicles.....                                       | 21 |
| Employees.....  | 22 |
| Safety deposit box.....   | 22 |
| Legal aspects:  |    |
| Amendment of corporation bylaws.....                            | 22 |
| Wills.....  | 23 |
| Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care.....                  | 23 |
| Release of medical information.....                             | 24 |
| Durable Power of Attorney for Business Affairs.....             | 24 |
| Income tax returns.....   | 18 |
| Quarterly payments for Sisters in residency.....                | 18 |
| Transfer of patrimony/inheritance.....                          | 18 |
| Interim cost-of-living payments.....                            | 18 |
| Sale of property.....   | 24 |
| Cemetery.....   | 27 |
| Chapel/relics.....  | 29 |
| Library.....  | 30 |
| Archives.....   | 31 |
| Oblate Program.....   | 32 |
| Development/Fund raising/Foundation/Donors.....                 | 33 |
| Lay Advisory Group(s).....                                      | 34 |
| Incorporated ministries and boards of directors.....            | 35 |
| Formal closure and farewell activities.....                     | 35 |
| Completing operations.....                                      | 37 |
| Merger of monasteries.....                                      | 39 |
| Appendix A: Covenant relationships.....                         | 41 |
| Appendix B: Temporal concerns in a merger.....                  | 44 |
| Appendix C: Other tasks in merger and whole group transfer..... | 52 |
| Acknowledgements.....   | 56 |

**4. Suggested Guidelines for Closing the Archives of an Institution which is Being Dissolved**

This is another document provided by the Federation of St. Gertrude – this one was written in 2003 – a generation ago! Recently though Elaine Nadeau FSS archivist reviewed it and still believes it is a valuable set of guidelines that could be used today.

<https://www.federationofsaintscholastica.org/resources-for-monasteries/>

In another article on page 5 of this newsletter is a listing of all of the Direction Statements from our 2018 General Chapter held in Cullman, together with items listed that the federation council believes are ways we have responded thus far to each of the direction statements.



### Direction Statements FSS Chapter 2018 – Actions taken

“We will assist communities in recognizing and navigating their critical junctures. This may include creative exploration of new ways of living monastic life.”

- current work with Liberty and Mexico City;
- inter-Federation committee work on suspension of governance and publication of Guidelines for the Modification & Suspension of Governance in Autonomous Monasteries;
- investigating, and making available options/models that can be useful as resources for communities, e.g., availability of LCWR resources, RCRI; NRRO (See separate article in this newsletter on Critical Junctures – Direction Statement 1 – Resources.)
- if something is working well with another community, share that with the next community.
- Through Gyrovagi publication of availability of resources
- Support of Being Benedictine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – conference scheduled in June 2020 in Atchison, KS

“We will address social justice issues in light of our monastic identity”

- consider Federation-wide group to address pertinent social issues;
- survey inquiring who the social justice contact is in each community and if they would want to network/meet (there was very low response to this);
- Federation made a contribution to the Border Project which was sent to Annunciation House in El Paso; several houses of our federation sent sisters as volunteers to the border
- Support of Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment (see article in this newsletter by Susan Mika, tireless leader of BCRI)

“We will continue to deepen our networking and collaboration with other federations.”

- Ongoing meetings and consultation on various issues among the federation presidents
- Interfederation suspension of governance committee;
- Meetings of Abbots and Prioresses in February 2019, and annual meetings of CBP;
- “55 & Under” meetings
- Interfederation archives committee
- Interfederation committee on assisting communities coming to completion/in transition
- Interfederation Heritage Committee (to preserve the history of our first monastery in the USA, St. Joseph Monastery in St. Marys, PA)
- Shared the text of our constitutions with the newly forming European monastic congregation made up of 11 monasteries of nuns in 7 different countries
- Involvement in Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum through delegates elected by the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses. Currently both delegates from our region are from our federation, as is the CIB Moderator.

“We will promote our Benedictine identity and mission for the life of the world through our centennial celebration and in other life-giving ways that respond to the reality of our times.”

- work of the Centennial committee with cards, website and podcasts
- T-4 project, which will now include a section for Oblates
- support Angela Nuokos, OSB in her desire to establish a Benedictine presence in the Caroline Islands
- Publication of featured members communities on our federation website shows the variety of creative ways of continuing to live our monastic life in our monasteries.

(as of 4-3-2020)

**Centennial Planning for the Federation of St. Scholastica**—by Linda Romey, Co-chair Centennial Committee

The Centennial Committee needs your help--or, more specifically, the help of your community archivist. We've begun work on an anniversary publication--a special, enlarged edition of Benedictines magazine that will publish in June 2022. Jennifer Halling, editor of Benedictines magazine, and Judith Sutera, Atchison, have joined our editorial committee.

One of many features will be a pictorial timeline. A condensed version will appear in the anniversary publication with an expanded, online version available to all readers. To make this happen, we need pictures and brief captions of significant events throughout each of our community histories.

Click here [[https://scholastica-celebration.org/sites/default/files/pdf\\_uploads/handout\\_cbp\\_jan2020.pdf](https://scholastica-celebration.org/sites/default/files/pdf_uploads/handout_cbp_jan2020.pdf)] to download a flier with more detail including login instructions for a drop box account where you'll find a folder with your community name on it. We're suggesting that you select a few photos each month to upload between now and September 2020. Consider a monthly upload of photos and events, three or four possibly, by decade. If you begin in May, and your community was in existence in 1890, upload anything you have from the 1890s in May. In June, the 1900s. July, 1910s... And you'll have a couple extra months at the end when you'll probably have more to submit. Small bites are easier to digest!

We'd like to thank Christine Ereiser from Tulsa who offered weekly reflections on our Scholastica Celebration website for the past three months. Karen Brink from Pittsburg began her weekly reflections with the first Sunday of Lent. Be sure to sign up--and encourage your sisters, oblates and friends, to sign up to receive email alerts each week when the new post goes up. They can also choose to receive an alert when a new podcast is posted.

And we need more podcasts! Our most recent interviews were with Ursula Herrera from Boerne, Val Luckey from Erie and Susan Mika from Boerne. You can access all podcasts here. [<https://scholastica-celebration.org/podcasts>] If you'd like to do a podcast interview but aren't sure how, contact Linda [<mailto:lromey@gmail.com>] for instructions and help with questions. Below are some of the people featured in the podcasts--if you haven't listened to them yet, find some time, you'll be surprised at what you learn. And then, share the podcasts on your social media accounts so others can learn about how we live Benedictine spirituality." (Con't on Page 7)





Between podcasts and weekly reflections, we are increasing traffic to our site--1,500 visits in January and 1,700 in February. That's a lot of people learning about our Benedictine life, work and spirituality.

The committee tries to share Facebook posts from any of our communities to the Scholastica Celebration Facebook page but since none of us spend inordinate amounts of time on Facebook, we often miss posts. If there is something you'd particularly like shared, please don't hesitate to email one of us and ask us to go to your FB page and share your post on the Federation Centennial page. You can contact Ana Cloughly, Colorado Springs [mailto: [SA-na@benethillmonastery.org](mailto:SA-na@benethillmonastery.org)], Andrea Westkamp, Bristow [mailto: [awestkamp@gmail.com](mailto:awestkamp@gmail.com)],

Elisabeth Meadows, Cullman [mailto: [lynnelisabethosb@gmail.com](mailto:lynnelisabethosb@gmail.com)], Catherine Martinez, Tulsa [mailto: [srcatherine@stjosephmonastery.org](mailto:srcatherine@stjosephmonastery.org)] or Linda Romey, Erie [mailto: [lromey@gmail.com](mailto:lromey@gmail.com)]. Liz Brown is also a committee member but is exempt from Facebook posting by virtue of seniority!

### Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region – by Patricia Henry, OSB (Torreón)

A Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region was held at the Vatican from October 6 to 27, 2019. I have the impression that the attitude of many North American Catholics was “that’s so far away and really not my problem.” And yet what happens in the Amazon is incredibly important to all of us in terms of climate change. The Amazon River Basin, roughly the size of the forty-eight contiguous United States, is home to the largest rainforest on Earth and includes parts of eight South American countries.

The Synod’s title AMAZONIA: NEW PATHS FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, touches a theme dear to the heart of Pope Francis. An Integral Ecology hears and responds to both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. The more than 200 participants in the synod, “listened with the ear of the heart” as they analyzed the challenges and possibilities of the “world’s lung” that is home to 33 million people, 2.5 million of whom are Indigenous people.

The Final Document of the Synod outlined the need for an integral conversion that would include new paths for evangelization with pastoral, cultural, ecological and synodal dimensions.

Much of the media coverage focused on the ordination of married men (*virii probati*) and on women deacons, in order to respond to the pastoral needs of the Catholic communities in the region, many of which have Eucharist once or twice a year at the most. Those who followed the Synod waited expectantly for the response of Pope Francis to these and other propositions. He surprised us, not with a list of doctrinal statements in response to the 120 propositions approved by the Synod Fathers, but with a poetic letter entitled *Querida Amazonia* in which he shared four of his cherished dreams for the People of God in the Amazon and in the world. This Apostolic Exhortation doesn’t pretend to replace the Final Document. On the contrary, and in contrast to the style of recent popes, Francis invites us to a careful and thorough reading of the Final Document and to make it our own.

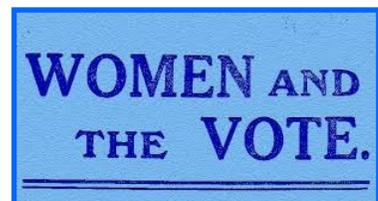
Rather than respond to intra-ecclesial issues, Pope Francis took a strong stand in solidarity with the Indigenous *communities over giant foreign economic interests*. In a prophetic call to us all, *Querida Amazonia* makes it clear that there will be no “new paths” without conversion on many levels.

*Several synod participants challenged North Americans to change their lifestyles and to engage in political action in support of Indigenous communities since we live from the benefits of the tragic exploitation of the Amazon principally by multinational companies involved in mining and deforestation.*

Both the Final Document and the Pope’s response recognize the invaluable service that women, and especially women religious, have given and continue to give in the Amazon. (F.D. 86, Q.A. 99) The fact is that there are many more religious women and catechists in the Basin than priests. Large numbers of women are leaders of local faith communities and respond to both the physical and the spiritual needs of the people as well as caring for the environment.

I was disappointed, however, that of the 35 women who participated in the Synod, superiors general, Indigenous leaders, theologians and sociologists, none were allowed to vote. Benedictine nuns from the monastery Fahr in Switzerland rallied at the Vatican in support of voting rights for women at the Synod.

(Con’t Page 8)



**Synod** (Con't. from Page 6)

My deepest concern has to do with the theology expressed in #101 of *Querida Amazonia*.

*The Lord chose to reveal his power and his love through two human faces: the face of his divine Son made man and the face of a creature, a woman, Mary. Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother.*

While I have great devotion to Mary, I find it disturbing that the document returns to a vision that compares men to the divine, and women to the human. The results of such a vision have had tragic consequences for women throughout history. Now more than ever we need to strengthen our conviction that every human being is made in God's image and likeness; and that Mary is the model of discipleship for all of us baptized women and men. With her *fiat* in the name of us all, she received the Savior of all of humanity. (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #58-59).

On the whole, the Synod's Final Document and *Querida Amazonia* are a challenging, prophetic voice that we fail to take into account at our own risk.

They continue to call us to the conversion process initiated with *Laudato Si*, that goes beyond the long-held conviction that man is the center of the universe, and holds everything in his power, including women and the entire natural world..

I hear echoes of the opening paragraph of *Gaudium et spes* throughout the two documents:

*The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.*

The burning questions found in the propositions of the Final Document, women deacons, married priests, an Amazonian Rite in the Liturgy, an integral ecological focus that gives priority to the cry of the poor and of the earth, weren't answered in *Querida Amazonia*, but they weren't shelved either. They are still on the table for further discussion.



**"Being Benedictine in the 21st Century: Spiritual Seekers in Conversation,"** planned for June 26-28, 2020 in Atchison, KS, is a first-ever gathering of professed Benedictines, Oblates, and seekers who have experienced a conversion of heart through contact with Benedictine spirituality. Currently more than 40 monasteries are represented with vowed and/or oblate participants. Registration is approaching capacity so if you or your community would like to be part of this conversation, please register now at:

<https://www.beingbenedictine.org/>

Speakers including Joan Chittister, oblate authors Kathleen Norris and Judith Valente, and Judith Sutera. Their input will lead into the facilitated conversation which is the core of this gathering that hopes to begin scripting a new roadmap for spreading the light of Benedictine spirituality well into the 21st century.

Conference fee is \$175 and includes meals. Very reasonable hotels are across the street from the conference center, links are on the Being Benedictine web page. (Monastery and Sophia Center housing is filled.) Questions? Email Linda Romey, OSB [mailto:lromey@gmail.com]



**Check it out!**

Federation Website – What you can find there – New Tab The federation website, which continues to be updated and maintained by Thérèse Hayden (Cullman), now has a new tab: **Resources for Monasteries**

<https://www.federationofsaintscholastica.org/resources-for-monasteries/>

You will find there links to three documents in PDF format:

- \* Federation of St. Gertrude Closure Handbook
- \* CBP Guidelines for Modification and Suspension of Regular Governance in Autonomous Monasteries
- \* Suggested Guidelines for Closing the Archives of an Institution which is Being Dissolved

Please note that when you click on the tab, it will ask you for the password necessary to gain access to protected areas of the site, like our constitution. If you have forgotten what the password is, just email Thérèse ([thereseosb03@gmail.com](mailto:thereseosb03@gmail.com)) or Lynn ([lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com](mailto:lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com)) to ask for it.

Also, please check back with the federation website at least once a month where you will see a different **featured member community** posting interesting events and information about what is going on in that monastery.

And don't forget if you have not already signed up to receive notices about news posted to our federation website, please do! You can find the place to sign up near the bottom of the home page of the federation website:

<https://www.federationofsaintscholastica.org/>

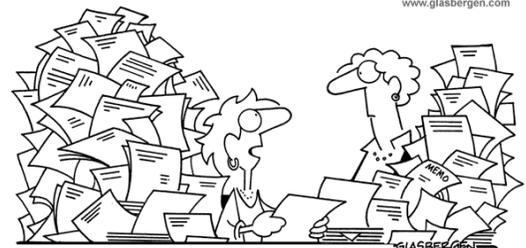
**Kay Fitzgerald—the Organizer**

A big THANK YOU to Sister Kay Fitzgerald of the Bristow community at St. Benedict Monastery for coming to Cullman to assist me in the federation office, to help me become better organized and more efficient in my work space!



God bless Sister Joanna and the Bristow community for sparing Sister Kay for some days to come to Cullman! Sister Kay is a gem! God bless you, Kay!

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www.glasbergen.com



"I am not disorganized — I know exactly where everything is!  
The newer stuff is on top and the older stuff is on the bottom."

## **Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment (BCRI)** by Susan Mika

The Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment (CRI) continues to work together to learn what corporate responsibility/accountability means in our time. Members of the group take part in various actions. Some are able to file stockholder resolutions to ask companies about their policies on such topics as climate change, human rights policies, human trafficking actions, child sex trafficking prevention policies, prescription drug price increases. Some are able to educate their members and Oblates on these various topics. Some are able to reach out to our government officials on immigration policies.



Recent actions have included:

- Filing 39 resolutions with 30 companies
- Signing a statement on what corporations can do during the Covid-19 Crisis
- Writing nine letters to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) about proposed new rules to drastically restrict shareholders access to raising questions with management
- Continuing to raise questions about the U.S. immigration policies which are being enforced
- Sharing Prayer Resources to raise our awareness on justice issues

Currently there are 15 of our federation monasteries who are members of BCRI.

**Please consider joining today and encourage other Benedictines you know to also join.**

Putting your investments to work for justice is an important work!

The following are current Member Monasteries of BCRI:

**Mount St. Scholastica**

(Atchison, Kansas)

**St. Scholastica Monastery**

(Boerne, Texas)

**Benedictine Sisters of Virginia**

(Bristow, Virginia)

**St. Scholastica Monastery**

(Chicago, Illinois)

**Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration**

(Clyde, Missouri)

**Benet Hill Monastery**

(Colorado Springs, Colorado)

**St. Walburg Monastery**

(Covington, Kentucky)

**Sacred Heart Monastery**

(Cullman, Alabama)

**St. Walburga Monastery**

(Elizabeth, New Jersey)

**Mount St. Benedict**

(Erie, Pennsylvania)

**St. Scholastica Monastery**

(Fort Smith, Arkansas)

**Sacred Heart Monastery**

(Lisle, Illinois)

**Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore**

(Lutherville, Maryland)

**Benedictine Women—Holy Wisdom Monastery**

(Madison, Wisconsin)

**Monasterio de San Benito**

(Mexico City, D.F.)

**St. Gertrude Monastery**

(Newark, Delaware)

**Immaculata Monastery**

(Norfolk, Nebraska)

**Mount Savior Monastery**

(Pine City, New York)

**St. Mary Monastery**

(Rock Island, Illinois)

**Benedictine Sisters of Florida**

(St. Leo, Florida)

**Christ the King Priory**

(Schuyler, Nebraska)

**Monasterio Pan De Vida**

(Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico)

**Mother of God Monastery**

(Watertown, South Dakota)

**Sacred Heart Monastery**

(Yankton, South Dakota)

### **Partner Community:**

**Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth**

(Leavenworth, Kansas)

We are grateful for the tireless work that Sister Susan Mika of St Scholastica Monastery in Boerne TX does to make our justice work involving our investments meaningful and relatively easy. THANK YOU, SUSAN!



## Federation President's Visit to Monasteries in Spain

Because I was attending the meeting of the AIM International Council held in León, Spain, I took the opportunity to visit also a number of the monasteries of Spain. What an experience of a lifetime!



Sister Lynn with M. Rosario del Camino, abbess of Monasterio de San Pelayo in Oviedo

I say here a special word of thanks to M. Rosario del Camino (Oviedo), CIB Region 2 Delegate, for planning the first two weeks of my time while I was there, and M. Maria del Mar (Montserrat), CIB Region Two Substitute and CIB Administrative Council member, for planning my third and final week there.

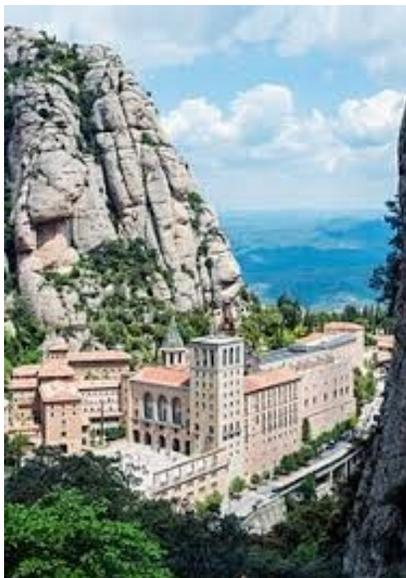
My first few days after arriving in Spain were spent at the monastery in León for the meeting of the AIM International Council. It was my first time to attend and participate in the AIM meeting. (See separate article about the AIM International Council meeting in León.)



M. Maria del Mar, abbess of Monestir de Sant Benet, Montserrat

I visited the following women's monasteries:

- Monasterio de Santa María de Carbajal in León, founded in 966
- Monasterio de Santa Cruz in Sahagún, founded in 1546
- Monasterio de San Pedro de Dueñas in San Pedro de Dueñas, founded in the 11th century
- Monasterio de Santa María de las Dueñas in Alba de Tormes, founded in the 13th century
- Monasterio de la Ascensión in Zamora, founded in 1970
- Monasterio de San Pelayo in Oviedo, founded sometime before 994 (exact date unknown)
- Monasterio de San Pelayo in Santiago de Compostela, founded in 1499 (but previous to that was a men's Benedictine monastery that was founded in the 9th century)
- Monasterio de la Transfiguración del Señor in Trasmañó, founded in 1567
- Monestir de Sant Daniel in Girona, founded in 1017
- Monestir de Sant Pere de les Puelles in Barcelona, founded in 945.
- Monestir de Sant Benet in Montserrat, founded in 1952 as a union of 2 monasteries, one from the 13th century and the other from the 19th century



In addition, I also visited the men's monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, founded in the 11th century, and home of *La Maroneta* (the Black Madonna) which is visited by millions of pilgrims each year.

What a blessing this time of pilgrimage was for me! The experience of *communio* with my Spanish sisters of St. Benedict (las Benedictinas) was palpable. Each house welcomed me with open arms and warm Benedictine hospitality. At each of the monasteries I visited I shared some about what CIB is, stressing always the first word of CIB, *COMMUNIO*.

It was a sacred time for me and gave me a stronger sense of the sisterhood we share in our ancient Order of St. Benedict. Las Benedictinas de España viven la Regla de San Benito con fidelidad y belleza. (The Benedictine women of Spain live the Rule of St Benedict with fidelity and beauty.)



### AIM International Council meets in León, Spain by Elaine Nadeau

A group of monastics from all over the world gathered at Monasterio de Santa María de Carbajal in León, Spain for the annual meeting of the international council meeting of AIM (Alliance for International Monasticism) [<http://www.aimintl.org/en/149-en/-sp-252/1171-welcome-to-the-alliance-for-international-monasticism>]. It is my privilege, as CIB Moderator, to serve on this Council. There was a steep learning curve for me, as I have had little experience with AIM. I, of course, knew of AIM-USA headquartered in our own Mount St Benedict Monastery in Erie, but knew little else. I was happy that I knew some of the Council members before arriving. The one I have known the longest is Ann Hoffman of the Erie monastery and Executive Director of AIM-USA. Ann and I are contemporaries in monastic life, having participated together many years ago in the Benedictine Spirituality Workshop and Retreat (BSWR for Benedictine Sisters preparing for perpetual monastic profession).



M. Ernestina, abbess of Monasterio de Santa María de Carbajal in León with Abbot Jean Pierre Longeat, President of AIM International

As CIB Moderator, I was asked to give a report to the AIM Council about the CIB. I shared with them about the experience of the CIB Conference of Delegates which met in Cuernavaca and in Mexico City in September 2019. I was especially happy to report to them about

the excellent workshop given by our own Esther Fangman (prioress at Mount St Scholastica in Atchison) on sexual abuse and how to help our sisters who have been abused. At the meeting in León there was silence in the room as I gave some of the information that Esther shared with us in Mexico. And afterward, there was a long discussion, including sharing of personal stories of abuse, that was quite moving. A big THANK YOU to Esther for her work with the CIB. I was also proud to report that one of the other presenters in Mexico was our own Maricarmen Bracamontes (prioress at Monasterio Pan de Vida in Torreón). Maricarmen spoke to us about the wide-ranging topic of the Latin American monastic experience. She gave many hours to the preparation of this presentation. MUCHAS GRACIAS, Maricarmen! Patricia Henry (also of Torreón) performed wonderfully as translator for the meetings. And Mariana Olivo (also of Torreón) was the quick at hand technology assistant to Sister Esther as she gave her power point presentation. It made me proud of our federation to be able to have these great contributors.

Also from our federation in attendance were CIB Region 9 (USA & Canada) Delegate Tonette Sperando (Cullman) and Substitute Delegate Clare Carr (Colorado Springs), as well as Mary Jane Vergotz (Erie), long time executive secretary of CIB. Muchisimas gracias to Mary Jane for her decade of service to the CIB! She has served with generosity and distinction. Recently, Mary Jane handed over the reins as CIB executive secretary to Mary Luke Jones (Beech Grove).

I encourage you to go to the AIM International website, linked above, to learn more about the important work they do in service to monasteries around the world that need assistance in living the monastic life under difficult circumstances. When we give to AIM-USA, we give to AIM International. Please be generous as you are able. Thank you to Ann Hoffman and the Benedictines of Erie for their huge service to worldwide monasticism over many years!



S. Adelaida Ygrubay, prioress of Missionary Benedictines in Philippines (on left) and S. Ann Hoffman, executive director of AIM USA (Erie)

### **Prioresses to Presidents: A Case for the Archival Record** by Elaine Nadeau

Prioresses had been Congregation presidents since its inception until 1971. There are logical reasons why there was a shift away from this requirement, codified in rule and tradition, that a Congregation president *must* be a prioress, to disallowing serving prioresses altogether. Being a prioress is a demanding job; being Congregation president is a demanding job. Most would agree that it is too much to ask of one person. However, in archives and in historical research, *knowing* why something happened on an intellectual level is not the same as having the factual evidence, the how and why, the smoking gun.

The last prioress who served as Congregation president was Sister Mary Susan Sevier of Cullman, Alabama. The first non-prioress president was Sister Joan Chittister of Erie, Pennsylvania. Interesting discussions about the Congregation president were occurring during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Many of the changes that have fundamentally shaped the present Federation appear to have happened around 1968.

The 1966 to 1968 constitution states the requirements for presidency: "The Prioress or former Prioress eligible to be elected Mother President must be at least forty years of age and have made first profession at least ten years previously." The 1968 to 1969 constitution has the glaringly obvious omission of the term "Mother President" replaced with an eye-catching insertion of "Sister President." Closer inspection of contemporary events lends some light on this change.

The 1968 Pre-Chapter meeting begins to delve into the role of prioress as president. The minutes of the meeting include a brief summary of the discussion "concerning the qualifications, term of office, and manner of election of the mother president of the congregation." The summary leaves something to be desired; what points or objections were raised? Was this a continuation of a previous discussion? The minutes of the previous chapter, pre-chapter, and council meetings make no reference to this discussion, yet one must assume that it was not raised out of the blue. Or do we assume that with all the other on-going changes and turmoil of the post-Vatican II announcements that such a change was simply an obvious one and was raised and considered with no fanfare? This may be less of an issue of a lack of materials available in the archive, and simply the manner of note taking that they employed in this era.

Just a few months later, bulletin #4 from the Chapter meeting of 1968 states that "The President is to be relieved of all duties except the service of the Congregation. She is to be provided by the Congregation with secretarial help and an operational fund." The minutes of June 23, the day before the bulletin, references this statement but places it on hold until Mother Mary Susan "should give her resume of what the president does." There was also, in the chapter and council minutes, some discussion about the president living separately from her community, perhaps in a "Benedictine Center" with the other Federation's presidents. Such a motion was in line with the general community living "experimentation" which was the focus of many meeting sessions. This is the largest piece of evidence that the move towards having non-prioress presidents had already been addressed and decided, as it would be unthinkable to have a prioress live apart from her community.

During these years Sister Mary Susan states that she wants to be called sister, not mother. Manners of address were changing, so too the strictness of the organizational hierarchy. Was this loosening of hierarchical structures part of the change in presidential requirements? At the 1971 Chapter meeting she is firm in not wanting to be up for reelection, a sentiment she wrote of often in her correspondence in the preceding year. It is at this meeting in 1971 that Sister Joan Chittister is elected. In the months after, she spent a week with Sister Mary Susan, learning the ropes. By 1974 the Congregation had become the Federation.

This is our accessible evidence. It tells us when the change happened from Mother presidents to sister presidents, but it does not tell us why. It shows the weakness of the archival record; the archival record is only as strong as the material preserved and its accessibility. It is likely that we may find the why in one of the film reels that we possess. They did, after all, record the sessions. Yet how many of us can currently play a film reel? How many of our film reels are in playable condition and do we have the equipment? When was the last time they were checked? Within the paper record, are we missing minutes that would lend light to the situation? What about supplemental materials? Many topics referenced in the minutes have no additional materials to reference as the delegates at the time would have had. All collections should have finding aids to help a researcher narrow down where they need to look for their answers; they should be full and

(Con't. on Page 14)



This year the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses gathered in January at Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, South Dakota. Miraculously travel was unimpeded at this winter time! We were especially grateful for the presence of Sister Michaela Hedican (back row far left) of St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota and for her beautiful sharing on Servant Leadership and the Sermon on the Mount. It is always a joy to be together. As often happens, we met at the time of the Super Bowl, so we had a fun Super Bowl party with spirited cheering!

Note the presence of Sister Shawn Carruth (3<sup>rd</sup> row on the right), prioress of St. Benedict Monastery in Crookston, MN. We were saddened and shocked to hear of her death on March 26, 2020. May she rest in peace and may her sisters be consoled.

### Prioresses to Presidents (Con't from Page 13)

complete enough that not much time is wasted going down dead ends. Answers are found through much digging, but the question always lingers: is the answer to the question just a little further down the rabbit hole? Our archives are full of answers, but without proper processing, describing, and reference, those answers may as well not exist. Even with those steps, sometimes the answers were never brought to the archive at all.

The old adage of the archive still rings true: Spend your time processing the materials or spend your time in reference. We might also expand this sentiment to include "save your materials now, or lack your answers later."

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Thank you to Elaine Nadeau, archivist for the Federation of St. Scholastica!

### Prayer in the Time of COVID-19

O Holy Father Benedict and Holy Mother Scholastica, We ask you to intercede for our world as we face the danger of the coronavirus. May we have your faith to remain strong, your love to give to our hurting and frightened world, and your fidelity to the monastic way of life with which we have been entrusted. Knowing we are your followers, imperfect though we are, we call on your strong advocacy before God's generous providence asking for protection and deliverance from this dread disease. We ask this of you, faithful founders of our way of life who live in full union with the God who loves us and wants only our good.  
AMEN  
CIB