

Advent Greeting 2021



**Those who lived in a land of deep darkness
— on them light has dawned. Is. 9:2**

**With Jesus, may we be sources of light
for our world and for each other!**

We are very happy to be in contact with AIM (Alliance for International Monasticism) which brings Benedictine communities from all around the world into contact with each other. These relationships are founded upon mutuality and our common search for God in our community life. The coordinators approached us with the question, "How has your community responded to the pandemic?" As a community we reflected on the question and wrote this article as a response to their request. We thought to share this with the wider community.

We wish you all a blessed Advent season and Christmas.

**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. Mercy is God's self-emptying out of love for us (God's *kenosis*) that becomes flesh in Jesus. Created in the image of God, we live in the likeness of God's humility and mercy and are called to empty ourselves out of love for all people and all creation. God breathed life into everything and saw that it was good, and even "very good." The mercy of God is an horizon for the message of Christmas. It begins with the generous response of Mary who in her poverty, her emptiness and simplicity says "Yes" to open herself to the Spirit of God becoming new life in her on behalf of her people. The parched land blossoms again with flower and song.

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 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*. ■