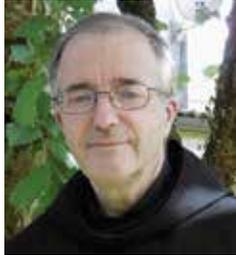


# Alliance Inter-Monastères

*Newsletter, 2021 - 1*



Dear brothers, dear sisters, dear friends,

**T**his brings you a few echoes of the activities of the AIM during this period of recovery, and some items of news sent in by one or other correspondent of the AIM in the course of recent months.

## COVID 19

### • India

*From Fr James Mylackal, Prior of Navajeevan and since February 2020 President of the ISBF*

At the moment India has the highest number of confirmed cases in Asia. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 India had the second largest number of confirmed cases (after the United States) with 29.3 million reported cases of Covid-19, and the third greatest number of deaths due to Covid (after the USA and Brazil), 367,081 deaths.

At the end of 2020 infection from Covid was decreasing and was under control. What went wrong in India in 2021? Principally, there were political elections: five States in India organized elections; before the elections there were several electoral campaigns, political meetings, and a large number of people came to vote. Secondly, India is a land of festivities: people come together for religious celebrations disregarding the Covid protocol. Thirdly, many Indians came back from foreign countries and migrant workers moved around here and there, travelling in the interior of the country in search of work.



The negative impact of Covid in rural India was

- A deep crisis in the agricultural world. Casual workers, migrants and farmers were badly affected because they have neither ready cash nor means of earning any money. Lockdown brought losses to every enterprise.
- The price of vegetables, fruit, milk and other basic products increased because of poverty. There was a serious lack of bottled gas and the police would not allow anyone to leave their villages.
- Lack of medical centres, lack of disinfectants and masks. In district hospitals patients suffering from any malady other than Covid were no longer treated, whatever their condition. Because of lack of doctors and the high number of patients in the hospitals, patients were incorrectly treated.



- The price of disinfectants and masks went up and the poor had no means to buy them. All kinds of medical supplies were lacking in local pharmacies, and because of the lockdown it was impossible to get to the towns.
- Students were unable to return to their own region when the lockdown was announced. They had difficulty in obtaining food and basic necessities. Schools and colleges were closed.
- One of the major problems was disinformation. For instance, certain medications were supposed to help people strengthen their immune systems, but the consequence was a negative effect on the liver.
- Mental health was affected by lockdown. People coming in from outside the villages could not stay isolated. They did not stay apart and they did not recognize the gravity of the situation.



Many of us underwent exhausting days, combatting fever, weakness and breathing difficulties. Many lost their nearest and dearest, some lost their jobs and all their financial reserves, and were reduced to sleeping rough. Many priests and religious died. This is a matter of grave concern in India. Since April four bishops have died of Covid in India. More than 525 priests and religious in the country died of Covid: according to the official figures of the Catholic Church in India on 15<sup>th</sup> June 273 priests, 9 religious brothers, 252 female religious (including one Sister of Grace and Compassion and another of the Congregation of St Lioba).

Because of the crushing number of people infected, certain monasteries offered their houses, guesthouses, retreat houses, hospitals as centres for the treatment of Covid in collaboration with the Indian government. Benedictines joined other religious to offer services, share resources, food and other necessities for the poor, each according to their capacity. Priests hardly carried on their ministry or not at all. There was a drop in local incomes and therefore an inevitable financial crisis. On the whole, however, the Benedictines of India and Sri Lanka accepted the situation and maintained a calm and serene monastic life in their respective monasteries.

The Athenaeum Sant' Anselmo offered to the monasteries of ISBF, both men and women, five weeks of on-line courses on monastic subjects from 1st August to 1st September.

## • Argentina and Uruguay

*From Mother Maria Isabel Guiroy, former Prioress of Our Lady of Paraná*

### – Community of Our Lady of Paraná (Aldea María Luisa)

A new Prioress was elected on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020 at Our Lady of Paraná, Mother Rosa Maria Alonso, one of the founding nuns of the community. She took over from Mother Maria Isabel Guiroy, who had been in charge for nearly 24 years. Despite the tragic situation of the pandemic this was a time of reflection which gave an opportunity for community meetings, on-line conferences on formation and a time of deepening the life of the community and the perspectives of the future.

The sisters witness that the election of the new Prioress marks a renewal for them: 'It is as though we were beginning the foundation anew, with the enthusiasms and the illusions of a beginning, but at the same time an opportunity to praise the Lord and rejoice from the bottom of our hearts for all the graces and wonders which he has worked among us, beginning with the great gift that the monastery has continued to exist and to make progress despite difficulties and misfortunes.'



The community consists of nine sisters. Their activities include a jam-factory and reception in the monastic guesthouse, which has an important place in our lives.

In the province of Entre Rios there has been a century-old tradition of Benedictine presence provided by the Abbey of Niño Dios, founded in 1899, the first Benedictine Abbey in Argentina.

– **Abbey of San Benito (Luján)**

This community has also suffered attacks of Covid. Dom Pablo Saenz, aged 94, died. Abbot Jorge Moran was badly affected, but is slowly recovering.



– **Abbey of *Mater Ecclesiae* (Canelones, Uruguay)**

The community was badly affected by Covid-19. Almost all the nuns were infected except Mother Abbess, Maria Margarita Maillot and three others, but no one needed to be hospitalized.

• **Africa**

*From Fr Olivier-Marie Sarr, Abbot of Keur Moussa*

– **Abbey of Keur Moussa (Sénégal)**

At the beginning of the pandemic in Senegal (March 2020) echoes from Asia and Europe, and a limited knowledge of the virus and its modes of transmission, created a breath of panic. In the monastery of Keur Moussa this resulted in a certain isolation, added to the fact that the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Dakar had decided to suspend all public liturgical celebrations until 1<sup>st</sup> November. Hence the abbey church, the guesthouses and the shop remained closed. Nevertheless the Bishop of Thies made an exception for the celebration of Mass every Sunday (but not during the week) for our neighbouring sisters at Keur Guilaye. In addition, the monks insisted that the work-force should stay at home to avoid infection. To compensate for this lack of labour the courses given in the Studium were halted in favour of cultivation of the nine hectares of land used for the cultivation of fruit and other activities. Despite all these efforts it turned out to be impossible to maintain the flow of various products because of the absence of the main clients coming from Dakar (prevented by the strict confinement in the different regions), absence of the faithful and closure of our shop. An attempt to launch an on-line shop was not too successful.



Another consequence of this isolation was limited contact with oblates and friends of the monastery. They willingly took part on-line in our various offices, but a series of technical difficulties and the uncertainty of the connection compelled them to use some recordings by the You Tube of the monastery.

The economic consequences of the pandemic in the country must be obvious, with a social crisis (lack of work) which provoked an uprising of extreme violence last March.

All the same, the quality of fraternal relationships during this whole period of lockdown was remarkable, with a fine attendance in choir. There was a notable lack of appointments with doctor or dentist for several months without any direct or indirect consequences on the health of the brethren, although in normal times there was an average of one or two appointments each week.

Finally, on a lighter note, we created moments of conviviality (BBQ on some evenings) with Compline in the fresh air, recreational afternoons, such as Thursday afternoon, since it was impossible for us to get to the sea.

– **The Saint Anne Structure**

The purpose of the St Anne Structure is to create real solidarity between its members over intellectual formation. Such mutual help consists for example in listing and making known the teachers of our monasteries

and allowing them – each according to their specialization – to work together, help one another, share courses and teaching material. To achieve this we envisage creating a website on the internet for offering all our monasteries of West Africa the opportunity of consulting and visualizing courses, or uploading and consulting bibliographies, articles, and reviews with the help of the Athenaeum Sant’ Anselmo, the AIM and other similar structures. In this way we would be able to compensate for the poverty of our libraries – and more.

We realize that some monasteries do not always have competent resident personnel for the studies of their young people in formation. It would fall to the Director of the St Anne Structure and the guiding team to consult with superiors about the existing formation-structures in our region, which would permit a useful integration between monastic and intellectual life. The studium of philosophy and theology in the monastery of Our Lady of Bouake is a useful illustration of this.

In the last analysis it falls to the St Anne Structure to adapt and respond to the new needs of our communities in the matter for formations of teaching monks and nuns.

### – Studium of the monastery of Our Lady at Bouake

For the last year the studium has been open to other monasteries. The cycle of theology from February to April 2020 was followed by seven students. The cycle of philosophy beginning in October will be followed by ten students from Ivory Coast, Togo and Ruanda. Six will be starting the study of theology, four continuing the course. The studium serves above all the monks and nuns of the sub-region. A certain suppleness is possible to suit the variety of needs, persons and expectations.



1<sup>st</sup> possibility: the superior wants to send a brother or sister to obtain a canonical baccalaureate/license in theology.

2<sup>nd</sup> possibility: the superior wants to send a brother or sister to follow a full course in theology without requiring a university validation (theological baccalaureate).

3<sup>rd</sup> possibility: the superior wants to send a brother or sister to follow several courses of theology or courses in one particular subject (Bible, spirituality, etc).

## Female congregations and other news of the CIB

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Following the apostolic constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* and the instruction *Cor Orans*, there is in Spain a new Congregation of twenty-four monasteries under the patronage of St Hildegard. Another Congregation, called ‘European’ has been created with Dinklage (Germany), Montserrat (Spain), Hurtebise (Belgium), Sweden, etc. The Camaldolese nuns are developing a new Congregation for themselves.

Several Congregations have managed that the number of years of formation should remain the same for monks and nuns in view of the fact that their Constitutions already foresaw this measure. Nevertheless, this is not the case for all Congregations.

The Congregation of St Scholastica in the United States is preparing a document on sexual abuse, with a fruitful collaboration between monks and nuns.

## DIM-MID

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In 2020 all the meetings of DIM-MID were cancelled or postponed. This gave an opportunity to work on translations. Brother Mateo Nicolini-Zani of Bose, is studying Christianity in China. After three centuries there has been a new missionary



effort at inculturation in that country. How can Christianity be expressed and lived in a 'style' close to Buddhism and in Buddhist terminology? In 2019 there was a first meeting on this theme at the Abbey of Slangenbourg with Br Pino from India.

A meeting from Ethiopia by Zoom with Muslims should be mentioned, especially from Iran. Such meetings occur two or three times a year.

We should again mention here the website [dimmid.org](http://dimmid.org), which presents remarkable contributions from the review *Dilatato corde*, as well as new exchanges of major interest.

The International Team of AIM is preparing a document on *Fratelli tutti* and monastic life.

The Council of the AIM will meet on 27-28th October at the Abbey of Dinklage (Germany).

With thanks for all contributions of every kind!

Fraternally

**Br Jean-Pierre Longeat**

President of AIM

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