

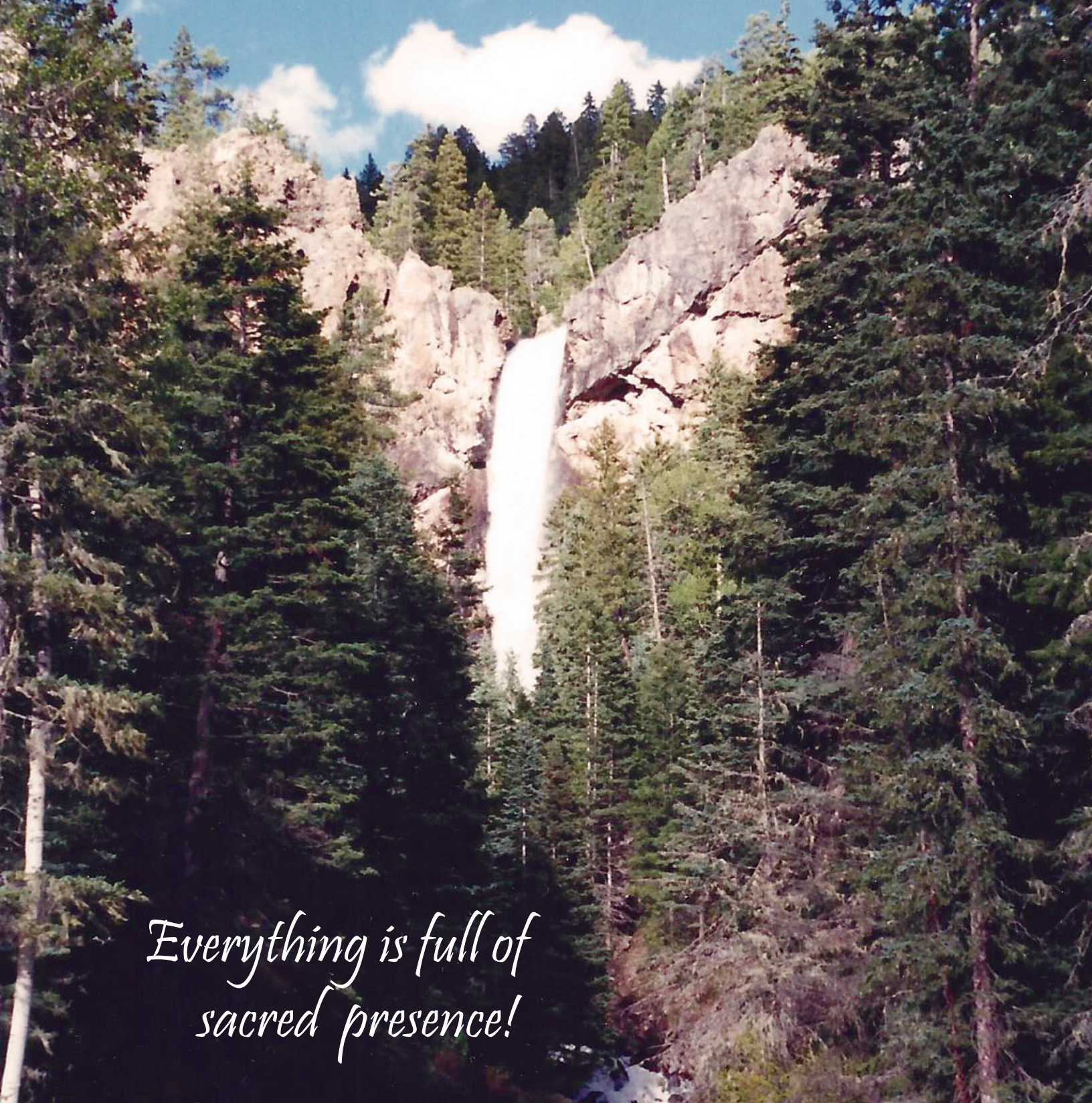

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*Everything is full of
sacred presence!*

Lament for the Universe

Edwina Gateley

***Once upon a time God said:
"I will create".***

And from a multitude of brilliant stars
a great fire-ball exploded
into the universe.

Over billions of years
it birthed galaxies, planets,
the moon and the sun
and the beginnings of life.

And God watched in delight.

Land and seas emerged
spanned by the great canopy
of the sky.

From the energy of soil and sea
living things appeared-
swimming, creeping, wriggling,
crawling, flying in vast
and brilliant diversity.

And God was very pleased.



Plants, bushes and vast forests
pushed forth from the rich soil,
mountains arose
and valleys unfolded
fed by rivers and streams.

***And God said:
"It is good".***

Then God called forth
the ultimate wonder of all creation:
Humanity evolved –
walking, exploring, discovering,
playing and thinking
on its journey into consciousness
and fullness of creation.

And God was very, very proud.



But, as humans developed-
growing strong and powerful
and self-aware,
they came to believe
that all God had created-
all that had gone before
for billions of years
in intelligent design-
was theirs-
to possess, use, cultivate,
consume or destroy.

And God hoped.

Then humans forgot their place
as a single piece
in the great cosmic jigsaw.

They set-about re-arranging
the earth's intelligent's design-
re-organising, dis-placing, consuming
and destroying
for profit and greed-
Until the winds blew hot and violent,
the oceans turned to acid,
the rains dried up, the soil turned to dust
and the forests disappeared.
the natural and balanced seasons
fell into dis-array
and billions of living, flying,
crawling and swimming creatures
lost their habitats
and died.

And God grieved.



But humanity
did not see nor understand,
for they had forgotten their place
and who they were
in the unfolding and inter-connectedness
of all creation.

And God wept and watched
as humanity began to sicken
with the destruction
of the home God had created for them...

And God whispered-

“Don’t die,
Don’t die..
Don’t let my creation die...”

And God pleaded with humanity- Please, Please-

“Don’t let my creation die.”

*Soul Whispers, Edwina Gateley, 2015
may be ordered from Edwina Gateley*

*Front cover and page 2 & 3 photos by
Claire Hudert, OSB*



Monastery of Santa María de la Esperanza Esmeraldas, Ecuador



Our community belongs to the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance – Trappists. We come from a Monastery in Spain founded in 1147 in Tulebras, Navarra, being the eighth foundation of this very fruitful mother. The Monastery of Santa María de la Esperanza (Our Lady of Hope) is located on

the Northeastern coast of Ecuador. Our climate is tropical, with paradisiacal beauty. We enjoy a vast view of the Esmeraldas River on its serene path towards its estuary into the Pacific Ocean. In the course of history, this area has been populated by diverse ethnic groups that are slowly dying out, but has as its wealth a Black population that leaves its very special and valuable mark in the region. Esmeraldas is a hot land with few variations in its climate; however, it does have very heavy rainy seasons. We enjoy our area. Diverse species of gorgeous birds, huge iguanas that look at us with alarming gravity, snakes that inspire respect, and a multitude of little creatures that captivate our attention but are not always that pleasant to see.

On January 26, we celebrate our Founding Fathers—Robert, Alberic, and Stephen who were summoned by the Church of Esmeraldas and arrived at this blessed place on January 26, 1990.



Sr. Virginia ready to work in beehives



Sr. Paola next to a teakwood planted in 2013

From the very beginning, the warm welcome the small community received created links of friendship and love that made the monastery a place valued by all, a space of prayer and hospitality.

The absence of a stable industry made it difficult for the community to become economically established. Vocations arrived very soon and showed perseverance. Although this form of monastic life, the liturgy, and the charisma attracted young women, having our own profitable work was not possible. We tried making cookies, sweets, etc. and later we decided to grow cattle—milk cows and meat cattle. These attempts did not resolve our financial situation and because of aggravating circumstances of frequent and violent thefts, the community decided to orient its efforts towards reforestation.

Our monastery has a 125-hectare property. Our bold decision to start a reforestation project started to take form and in view of an impossible task, in faith, we requested help. Our Father Immediate helped us make this first attempt to plant trees on the river shores a reality. Things worked out well because the monastery's location favored sales and wood transportation. Encouraged by success of this first trial (15 hectares of teakwood trees) we decided to sell all the cattle and to move on with the reforestation project of the whole property.

In 2013, with the help and generous response of AIM, and with a new push of financial aid from the Father Immediate, Abbot of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina, we started the second phase of reforestation. The area that had been devoted to cattle covered about 80 hectares of which 25 hectares were prepared for reforestation. We have requested financial aid again and we want to plant another 25 hectares this year.

Monastery of the Holy Spirit, OCSO Conyers, Georgia, United States



The garden in front of the guest house

The Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers was founded March 21st 1944. The parcel of property, just about 1,400 acres, is situated 30 miles southeast of Atlanta in what is called the Georgia piedmont. At the time of the foundation, the area was very rural with only dirt roads servicing the Monastery property. The property was part of a larger plantation that was still growing some cotton. In fact, when the monks arrived, there was still a number of sharecropper families living on the property. The land, like most of the Southeast, which was once clear-cut for farming was now a patchwork of fields, mixed hardwoods, and a good amount of pine.

One of the first things the monks did was set up a sawmill and begin harvesting local pines to build what was to be a temporary Monastery to house the brothers until a permanent Monastery could be erected. Some farming was done in the early years. Four large ponds were built using small streams and dams. The property had three named streams that passed through and emptied into a small river (South River) that served as its western boundary. Besides the named streams there were many more ephemeral ones crisscrossing the property and creating a sizeable amount of floodplain and swamps. Some of the swamps would be drained to make more farmland and eventually there were over 300 acres of hayfields that provided some income up until the 1990's. Over the years, the monks made use of the land for both farming and animal husbandry.

In 1974, the hayfields were still producing and a small cattle herd used several pastures. The first steps toward conservation came in the 1980s when the Community voted to put 500 acres into a permanent easement. The first easement with the US Corps of Engineers reclaimed, restored, and protected the vast majority of the Monastery's floodplains and swamps. This was a financial decision. In return for the easement, a wetland mitigation bank was established and the monastery received a one-time payment

for the sale of credits used to offset destruction of other wetlands in our watershed. The monastery now has a total of 1,042 acres under various permanent easements. One easement for stream mitigation is still in development.

Father Francis Michael Stiteler, Abbot, has personally spent over 40 years discovering the rich bio diversity of the Monastery lands. In that time, with the help of many others, he has identified over 200 species of birds, over 90 species of butterflies and 90 species of odonates (dragonflies and damselflies). Likewise he has an increasing amount of picture folders on reptiles and mammals, along with fish, crayfish and an inventory of all the plants on the property from trees to ferns. http://jimbotany.com/Monastery_Plants/index.htm Giving a nod, perhaps, to their vow of stability early Cistercians were called "lovers of the brothers and the land". Father Francis Michael is certainly happy to have found delight in both. Perhaps the most creative easement established by the monastery was for a natural conservation cemetery which at present is just less than 110 acres. The cemetery, which is open to the public, allows for natural burials — meaning no embalment and the use of biodegradable coffins or wrappings. The land is kept in a natural setting whether meadow or forest. It is at present the most active natural conservation cemetery in the Country.

Some other interesting facts are that the monastery does lease 4 or 5 acres to a local organic gardener. And over the years it has discovered many Native American arrowheads and artifacts from



The monks at prayer

as far back as 10,000 years ago. The monastery is proud, also, to be part of one of the newest National Heritage areas. Created in 2006 it includes nearby Arabia Mountain Preserve and Panola Mountain State Park. The Monastery's now 2,262 acres form its largest green space. In 2013, the Monastery granted a 9 acre easement to allow for a multi-use walking bicycle path that now connects to a trail system of over 200 miles.

Thank You Notes—Worth Noting...Worth Quoting

With great joy I acknowledge the arrival of the books sent by AIM USA. It was a big surprise, very much appreciated! The titles were excellent, most especially those books of Sr. Joan Chittister and one book of Michael Casey on the Prologue of RB! I thank you for sending them. Books here are very expensive and it is difficult to keep the library in a good path.



Benedictine Sisters in Tanzania, East Africa at study

five weeks in England to improve her communication in the language.

Thank you again, Sr. Theresa! We will keep you and AIM USA in our prayers and we also ask for yours!

Warm greetings, from your sisters from Salvador,
Sr. Vera Lúcia Parreiras Horta OSB
Abbess

Greetings in the Lord!

Please find here the questionnaire which you sent with the books. I sincerely thank you for sending us books which are very useful for our library and for the formation. As I indicated in the questionnaire, we need spirituality and monastic books as references used by our



New books arrive in a seminary in India

formation team and also for the Sisters. These are books not readily available here in our country. When available, we could not afford the cost. We are recipients of Mass stipends even before. We hope you could continue to assist us so that we can pay our chaplains who untiringly celebrate the Eucharist with us every day. The dioceses here now stipulate the amount for the Mass stipends. We are lucky that our chaplains allowed us to pay monthly much less than the other communities that they serve. They know that we are financially incapable.

For the moment, the number of readers in English in our community has increased. For Brazilians, the proficiency in English is only for a small part of the population, normally, those who have access to private good schools. We try to offer the study to the sisters more gifted in languages.

Our Sr. Maria had the beautiful possibility to represent our Region during the CIB last Symposium in Rome. Therefore, she stayed

Once again, thank you for your kind and generous help through books and the Mass stipends. We assure you of our prayer support for all your noble endeavors.

With every good wish and respect, I am Grateful in the Lord,
Mother Mary Araceli Escurzon, OSB
Prioress General
Philippines

Thank you for all the fantastic books. We Cistercian Monks here in Mendida, Ethiopia are all well, thanks to God. I hope you are all well.

Love and Prayer,
Fr. Kidane and Community
Mendida, Ethiopia



Sisters M. Esperanza, Jorgelina, and Mdel Carmen in library, Argentina, South America

who are making their retreat in order to help others in their parishes. So I can only say that we are very pleased with these gifts of books. No, they are surely not too difficult for our community... We promise our prayers for all your intentions. We have time now because this evening we will start our annual retreat. May Christ bless you and reward you for the precious work you are doing.

Loving and grateful greetings,
Sister Leonie, Librarian
Abbey of Our Lady of Praise
Uganda

We have received the bundle of books sent by AIM USA in good condition.

Thanks you very much for the same. We will remember you and the donors in our prayers.

With prayerful wishes,
Yours sincerely in our Lord,
Father Sylvester Kozhimannil
Dhyana Ashram
India

The Staff of AIM USA also thanks each and every person who donated the books that we were able to send to these monasteries. It is apparent that these books are needed and greatly appreciated.

AIM USA Welcomes Three New Board Members

We are happy to welcome three new members to the AIM USA Board: Sister Mary David Hydro, OSB, from Holy Name Monastery, St. Leo, FL; Sister Maureen McCabe, OCSO, from St. Mary Abbey, Wrentham, MA; and Abbot Francis Michael Stiteler, OCSO, from Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA.



Sister Mary David Hydro, OSB

Sister Mary David has a BA in elementary education and Religious Studies from Benedictine College in Atchison, KS and a Masters in Christian Spirituality from Creighton University. Her love of the Benedictine vocation spurs her on to share those values with new community members, Oblates and all with whom she comes into contact. Currently she is Subprioress, Vocation Minister, and Oblate/Volunteer Director. She is a member of the following committees: Community Liturgy, Corporate Commitment, Peace/Justice and the Steering Committee for Benedictines for Peace. She leads retreat/reflection days and spiritual direction.

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The Sisters and Oblates of Holy Name Monastery have been active in AIM USA's Monastery to Monastery program and Lenten Appeal for years. They first became involved after sending books to AIM USA and later meeting a recipient of their gift. Sister Mary David has given AIM USA Mission Appeals several different years. Also for the past 10 or more years the Benedictine Sisters of FL have provided room/board for 1 or 2 sisters from Tanzania who are studying at St. Leo University.

Mother Maureen McCabe entered the Cistercian Community of Mt. St. Mary's Abbey, Wrentham, MA in 1972 and learned to love baking bread, milking cows, and teaching Sacred Scripture. She served as Novice Director from 1986 to 2003, Vocation Director from 2003 to 2008, and was elected Abbess in 2008. She is very happy to serve on the AIM USA Board.



Mother Maureen McCabe, OCSO



Abbot Francis Michael Stiteler, OCSO

Abbot Francis Michael entered the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in 1974, made solemn profession in 1980, and was ordained in 1983. He has served as Novice Master and Vocation Director for 7 years and spent 25+ years in their Bonsai Nursery, and shorter terms as Under Master, Subprior, and Prior. He was appointed Superior ad nutum May 2003, elected Abbot for a 6-year term May of 2004, and re-elected Abbot for a 6-year term in May of 2010. He writes, "I came to the Monastery having fallen in love with God via scripture. I love Community and Monastic life though I have struggled to live many parts for over 40 years now. I continue to love Scripture and the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and just pondering the Mysteries. I love the world and the Church especially in its vast ever-amazing diversity (catholicity). My favorite theologian is George MacDonald, the inspirer of C. S. Lewis, Tolkien, and Charles Williams. I relax by taking to the woods in search of butterflies, dragonflies, birds, flowers and whatever else catches my eye. I need your prayers and promise you mine."

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The Alliance Continues



Sr. Yovina Mpale, OSB and Sr. Therese Glass, OSB enjoy an AIM USA newsletter.

In December of 2014 Sister Yovina Mpale, OSB, a member of the African Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christian's Congregation in Ndanda, Tanzania visited with staff at the AIM USA office in Erie, PA. This is her third year of study at Assumption College in Mendham, NJ; she will graduate from there in May of 2015. Then she will move to Yankton, South Dakota, where she will pursue Religious Studies at Mount Marty College. While there, she will live with the Benedictine Sisters at Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, South Dakota. Sr. Yovina has some familiarity with the community in Yankton since she had spent some time in the summer of 2014 with them; and she had previously met Sister Bonita Gacnik, OSB of Yankton when Sister Bonita was with the Benedictine Sisters in Ndanda, Tanzania as part of the African Women's Commission facilitated by AIM USA.

While in the Erie area, Sr. Yovina also visited the Benedictine Sisters of Erie at Mt. St. Benedict Monastery and Catholic Rural Ministry, Oil City, PA. Sr. Yovina greatly values her experiences in the United States. About them, she expresses much gratitude for a warm welcome, especially for the opportunity to pray with her Benedictine Sisters.

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Board meeting October 28, 2014 at Mt. St. Benedict, Erie



Standing (L-R): Karen Joseph, OSB (Ferdinand, IN), Susan Hutchens, OSB (Rock Island, IL) Pia Portmann, OSB (Norfolk, NE), Anne Shepard, OSB (Atchison, KS) and, Theresa Zoky, OSB (Erie, PA)
Seated (L-R): Abbot John Brahill, OSB (Aurora, IL), S. Anne Wambach, OSB (Erie, PA), Abbot John Klassen, OSB (Collegeville, MN), Mary White, OSB (St. Paul, MN), Abbot John Denburger, OCSO (Genesee, NY).



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Single Point of Light

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

There is a wonderful article by Anselm Grun, OSB, a monk of Munsterschwarzach Abbey, Germany, titled “St. Benedict and Creation,” in the A.I.M. Bulletin 2003 No. 78 and 79, that captures the theme of our newsletter.

Anselm begins his article by explaining how St. Benedict instructs his monks throughout the Rule in the careful use of creation. “One who praises Creation will use it carefully.”

He contends that the theology of St. Benedict is Creation theology. “Benedict is preoccupied with careful handling of creation and praise of the Creator, who has given us this marvelous world for us to take care of...”

This careful use of creation is concretely recognized when Benedict instructs the monks:

- ◆ to use the goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar (RB 31:10)
- ◆ to take responsibility for and care for the monastery grounds because of the vow of stability
- ◆ to be mindful that our spirituality shows concretely through how we use things (RB 32:1)
- ◆ to recognize God’s presence by the way we act, think, speak
- ◆ to glorify God through the works of the artisan who takes delight in creating beauty and sharing it humbly

“...there is a healthy and necessary rhythm in the life of a monk.” Living according to his/her biological and cosmic rhythm insures his/her physical and mental health and social harmony.

In conclusion, Anselm writes, “The monk must serve life in all its manifestations, life in nature and the life of men [all people]. When they employ themselves or use things with care, when they respect the rhythm of the living, they become themselves truly alive.”

“The expanded heart of the monk invites **all to seek God together**, to praise the Creator whose beauty permeates all creation.”

Amen, Amen
Alleluia, Alleluia

*Please have a wonderful summer, enjoy
Creation and take steps to care for it.*

Theresa Zoky, OSB

Theresa Zoky, OSB
Executive Director, AIM USA
director@aim-usa.org