



## *The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*October, 2016*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

In the beginning of October, I attended a meeting of the Board of Directors of *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID)* that was held at Mount St. Benedict in Erie, Pennsylvania. Our Congregation has been involved with MID for many years. MID is a board of Catholic monastic religious from the Benedictine and Cistercian orders, as well as advisors from various backgrounds and religious traditions. It works under the aegis of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. The purpose of MID is to foster dialogue with the monastic traditions of other religions, particularly Buddhism, which has an ancient monastic tradition. However, individually many members also dialogue with religions which do not have a monastic tradition, such as Islam.

MID, originally known as the *North American Board for East-West Dialogue*, was created in 1977, as a subcommission of *Aide a l'Implantation Monastique (AIM)*. AIM, the parent organization, was begun in 1957 by Abbot Tholens of Slangenburg in Holland, and Fr. Denis Martin, a member of a Benedictine foundation in Morocco. They saw the need for monastic life to be implanted in developing countries to bring to fullness of faith the young churches in the emergent nations. Soon they sought to ensure the survival of monastic foundations by providing material and spiritual aid.

AIM USA, the American Secretariat of AIM International, came into existence in 1973, when our Sr. Pascaline Coff, then Prioress General, accepted the responsibility to administer it. She delegated Sister M. Tharsilla Noser, now deceased, to assume its duties. From 1988-90, the AIM USA Secretariat was located in St. Scholastica Priory, Petersham, Massachusetts. When the office of AIM USA was moved to Mount St. Benedict, Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1990, the name was changed to *Alliance for International Monasticism*, a title which better reflects the goals of the organization: to promote cooperation and solidarity among monastic communities.

Over the years, it became evident that many monastics who were involved in interreligious dialogue wished to distance themselves from the missionary objectives of AIM. The result was the creation of a general secretariat to supervise activities in the area of interreligious dialogue. Within this new structure, the American MID and European DIM became full commissions in their own right. Since 1994, the American MID and European DIM have been independent of and yet complementary to AIM.

MID enjoys the full support of Pope Francis. In June, Sr. Anne McCarthy, OSB, a member of the Board and President of the International MID, was invited to meet with Pope Francis during a Buddhist-Catholic dialogue at a retreat center in Castel Gandolfo, Italy. It also has the wholehearted support of our newly-elected Abbot Primate, Abbot Gregory Polan of Conception Abbey, who is a member of the Board until his term expires on December 31.

I have long been convinced that interreligious dialogue is a crucial step on the path to peace. It is all the more urgent in these days of hateful and divisive rhetoric. Dialogue does not seek to change the other; it seeks to understand, appreciate, and respect the other, to hold the other in awe, to bow one's head to the Almighty, whom we all seek. We share spiritual practices and disciplines; we also share problems and aspirations. In dialogue, we come to place of silence, beyond which we cannot go, where we can only worship, each in our own way, the One who transcends time and place.

At this stage of its development, MID would like to include Benedictine oblates in some of its activities. If you are engaged in interreligious dialogue on any level, tell me about it and I will share it with the other MID members.

To learn more about these efforts, you can visit these websites: [www.dimmid.org](http://www.dimmid.org), [monasticinterreligiousdialogue.com](http://monasticinterreligiousdialogue.com), [www.aim-usa.org](http://www.aim-usa.org). A bi-annual on-line journal, *Dilatato Corde*, can be found at [www.dimmid.org](http://www.dimmid.org).

***And now the news:***

***The International Congress of Benedictine Oblates*** will meet Nov. 4-10, 2017, in Rome. The theme is *A Way Forward: the Benedictine Community in Movement*. I have no more information at present; hopefully more information will be forthcoming. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

**Clyde oblates:** The next Clyde weekend is scheduled for March 24-26, 2017, during Lent. The theme is yet to be determined, and more information will be forthcoming.

**Saint Louis area oblates:** The Saint Louis group has been reading and discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They have also been doing group *lectio* following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, “Lectio Divina Shared in Community” by Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month from 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne School, Room 1 (accessible from Door 1 at the east end of the school).

**Sand Springs** oblates have resumed their monthly meetings. The next meeting will be held this Sunday, October 2 at 11:30 am, following the 10:30 prayer service. Helen Pratt will guide our discussion from the chapter on “Prophecy” from Joan Chittister’s book, *In the Heart of the Temple*.

**Sheridan, Wyoming**, oblates have also resumed their monthly meetings, and have welcomed two new inquirers.

**Tucson oblates:** The last meeting was held on October 16. Sharon Hammond presented on the topic *Moral Injury*. The Prescott group is reading and discussing Michael Casey’s book, *The Road to Eternal Life*. The East Valley oblates have resumed the DVD series, *The Second Greatest Story Ever Told*.

Peace,

**Sr. Sarah**