

Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum
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Dear CIB Sisters,

It is with great joy that I write to you for the first time since my election as CIB Moderator on 15 September 2019. Perhaps I have been a bit slow to write, but I wanted to wait until after our first CIB Administrative Council, which was held recently at the Abbey of St. Scholastika in Dinklage, Germany.

[Note, if English is not your first language, you might wish to use www.deepl.com to translate this letter into your own language.]

First, allow me to introduce myself to you.

Sister Lynn Marie McKenzie, CIB Moderator (USA)



Since 1981 I have been a Sister of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama, USA. That is in the southeastern part of the USA where the weather is very warm in the summer months, but where it can also be cold in the winter months, with occasional snow. Alabama is where I was born to a Catholic family as one of eight children, and Alabama is where I have been most of my life, with the exception of a short time to do my canon law studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

After practicing civil law in Cullman for over 25 years and working part time in the marriage tribunal of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama and also as a canonical advocate for religious, in 2014 I was elected as president of my monastic congregation in North America. This Federation of St. Scholastica consists of 19 monasteries in the United States and Mexico. My first CIB experience was as a participant in the 2014 CIB Symposium. Shortly thereafter, I was elected as CIB Delegate by the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses of North America. Even though this time is brief, my CIB involvement has enriched my life so much. I feel that my Benedictine vocation has deepened and I hunger all the more to serve faithfully in this “school of the Lord’s service.”

I wish to introduce you to the other members of the CIB Administrative Council. I believe we are blessed to have these wise women in service to our international organization. They are: Mother Franziska Lukas, CIB Assistant Moderator (Germany), Mother Therese Marie Dupagne (Belgium), Mother Caritas Swai (Tanzania), Mother Maria del Mar Albajar i Viñas (Catalonia, Spain), and Sister Patty Fawkner (Australia). Sister Mary Jane Vergotz (USA) continues to serve as our CIB Executive Secretary. I asked these sisters to share some biographical information with you.



Mother Franziska Lukas (Germany), CIB Assistant Moderator

I followed the call to discipleship as a Benedictine woman in the community at the Abbey of St. Scholastika in Burg Dinklage, Germany in 1974 at the age of 20. I expected the call would demand of me a very secluded life, and I put my hope in God (RB 4,....) – a quote which fell to me at my profession and which has accompanied me all my life. The tasks of guest mistress, infirmarian and novice mistress widened my horizon and taught me the importance of personal relationships. Through our former Abbess Máire Hickey contact with people from other cultural contexts, both within and beyond the community, became a source of immense enrichment. This was especially so for me when I took part in the first MFP course (Monastic Formators' Program) in Rome 2002.

Shortly after being elected abbess in 2007 I was asked by the German Conference of Abbesses (VBD) to represent Region 6 on the CIB Conference of Delegates and from that time my knowledge of CIB was not just by hearsay but by my personal experience – since 2014 also on the CIB Council. “Putting our hope in God” has led our community now with amazing unanimity to join in the project of forming a new European Congregation together with 10 other communities from Sweden to Spain. With the help of this background I hope I can be of service to the CIB for a further term on the Council.



Mother Thérèse Marie Dupagne (Belgium)

I was born in 1959 in Belgium. Since I was a child the words of Jesus, “I am thirsty,” touched me. I would like to give him what he needs. I did studies in chemistry at the University of Namur and then I entered the monastery of Hurtebise in 1981. I chose the motto: “hidden with Christ in God” when I pronounced my vows on Easter Monday, 1984. I studied theology in the monastery and afterward in the Institute for Monastic Theological Studies in Belgium, and then at the University of Strasbourg. In 1997, my community elected me as prioress. My motto as prioress is: “Father, may they be one”. Since that moment, the call is in my heart to work for unity, for communion. As our God is Trinity in Unity, so we have to be. In this faith, I accepted the commitment in my

community, in the Union of Belgian Benedictine women (UBB) and in CIB. And now with 10 other communities we are busy building a new European congregation for Benedictine women. I’m happy to serve you, and I hope to be able to listen to your desires, and to build our CIB with you all.

Mother Caritas Swai (Tanzania)

I am Sr. Caritas Wilhelm Swai, born in Rombo, Kilimanjaro, Tanzania in 1957. I am the second born of nine children, five girls and four boys. I finished my primary education in 1972 and then entered religious life. I continued my studies up to form four and then I joined the Novitiate in 1979. On 24 may 1980 I made my first profession. I went to medical college for three years and then I started working as an



assistant clinical officer in medical wards and with outpatients. I made my perpetual profession in 1986. In 1989 I was transferred to another remote hospital as administrator.

In 2003, after having continued my studies in the medical profession, I was awarded a Degree as Assistant Medical Officer. I was caring for mothers and children in maternity wards until I was elected as Mother Superior on 2014. Now I am caring for my community. I love the CIB.

Mother Maria del Mar Albajar i Viñas (Catalonia, Spain)

I was born in 1970 in Barcelona. I am the fifth of a family of six children. I studied music since I was a



child and Business Studies and Economics at the University of Barcelona before entering the monastery of Sant Benet de Montserrat. As part of my studies, I spent one year in France, and one year in England. I also learned “Focusing” (a process that helps you listen to your inner wisdom), and became a trainer. After my solemn profession in 2007 I studied at the University of Berkeley, California, where I obtained the Licentiate in Sacred Theology.

I served as the Cellarer, Novice Mistress and choir director in my monastery, and taught “Focusing” until I was elected abbess in June 2015. Since then, I do what I can.

My CIB experience began as a translator at the 2010 and 2014 CIB Symposium. I was elected the CIB Substitute Delegate for Region 2 in May 2017, and became a member of the CIB Administrative Council in September 2018.

Sister Patty Fawkner (Australia)



I am Patty Fawkner and am the Superior of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict, the first congregation founded in Australia in 1857. After joining the Good Samaritan Sisters I ministered for many years in primary education before becoming an Adult Educator. I have ministered as a Media Officer with Catholic Religious Australia, as the Director of Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, and have twice served on my congregation’s Council. I am also a writer and facilitator. My formal tertiary qualifications are in Arts, Education, Theology and Spirituality. I was first introduced to the CIB when I was invited to co-facilitate the 2010 Symposium, and then attended the 2018 Symposium

as Delegate for Region 15 of Oceania. I am truly enjoying the rich network of relationships through CIB.



Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, CIB Secretary (Erie, USA)

I was born and raised in Erie, Pennsylvania, USA and am a graduate of St. Benedict Academy, a high school run by the Benedictine Sisters. I graduated from Gannon University in Erie and received a Masters’ Degree in Social Work from St. Louis University in Missouri. I was a Social Worker at Catholic Social Services in Dayton, Ohio, in the Erie Catholic Diocese, at Saint Vincent Rehab Center and in the home care department. I have been a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie for 38 years. I currently serve my community as the Director of Development and completed a successful \$3 million Capital Campaign in 2010. In the past I have served my community as the Vocation Director, Finance Committee member, Community Council Member, Sub Prioress, and chairperson of a number of committees and projects .I have been the CIB Secretary since 2011. I am an avid gardener, cook, world- wide traveler and enjoy reading. I have a strong interest in government and current affairs.

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Many of you were able to be at Sant’ Anselmo in Rome in September for the 2018 CIB Symposium when we had HOSPITALITY as our theme. “Let all be welcomed as Christ.” (RB 51) You are reminded that you can access the text of all of the talks as well as the many photos from the Symposium on the CIB website at: www.benedictines-cib.org. The talks are available in 5 different languages: English, French, German, Spanish and Italian. At the end of the symposium we surfaced many possible themes for the next symposium in 2022. They include: “The Old and the Young – Balance in the Monastic Tradition,” “Stability in a Time of Change,” “Unity in Diversity: Monastic Community as a Model for Living,” “Hope. Never Despair of the Mercy of God (RB 4),” “Fragility & Hope,” “Communion Rooted in Silence,” “Initial Formation: As She Truly Seeks God (RB 58).” At the end of the symposium, the participants were asked to evaluate the 2018 Symposium experience. Overall, the evaluations were very positive with participants expressing appreciation for being able to be part of something much larger, where the Benedictine language is lived in various languages, cultures and expressions, but with one common monastic vocation. A highlight, of course, was the audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican where each participant had the opportunity to personally greet the Holy Father.

At our Administrative Council meeting in Germany, we discussed many items on a long agenda. These included:

- reviewing of the evaluations of the 2018 symposium,
- planning next steps regarding *Cor Orans*,
- re-imagining the future of CIB at this new moment in history,
- strengthening the participation of the members of the 19 regions of the CIB,
- hearing a report about the Benedictine Confederation from Abbot Primate Gregory Polan and about his many activities in Rome and around the world,
- reviewing the CIB website and making suggestions for reports from the regions to appear on the website,

- receiving copies of Sister Scholastika's book on the historical and canonical development of the CIB (now available in a new English translation by Sister Marianne Burkhard of St. Mary's Monastery in Rock Island, Illinois , USA),
- studying the financial report from Sister Linda Romey (Erie, USA), who is the CIB treasurer, who recommended ways to cut down on expenses of the CIB Symposium and other CIB meetings, and
- planning future meetings of the Administrative Council and of the Conference of Delegates.

The meeting was both intense and lively, with full participation by each member of the Council. We

even had local media coverage of our international meeting. This is the group picture taken by the local newspaper photographer:



(From left to right: Therese Marie Dupagne, Franziska Lukas, Gregory Polan, Caritas Swai, Mary Jane Vergotz, Lynn McKenzie, and Maria del Mar Albajar i Viñas; not pictured is Patty Fawkner, who was unable to be with us in person, but did participate part of the time via a video conference call.)

See also <https://www.made-in-dinklage.de/dinklager-benediktinerinnen-vernetzen-sich-europaweit/> - website of Dinklage newspaper)

We are so proud of Sister Scholastika Häring for her good work in researching and writing her doctoral dissertation on the history of the CIB. As noted above, it is now available in both German and English.

For the German translation, published by EOS Edition Sankt Ottilien, you may order it by emailing a request to mail@eos-verlag.de . (Here is the German title: Häring, Scholastika , **Einander Geschwister sein ...** - Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB). Studie zur rechtlichen Entwicklung der Beziehungen benediktinischer Frauengemeinschaften untereinander und zur Confoederatio Benedictina (1965–2009).)

For the English translation, go to <http://www.lulu.com/shop/haring-scholastika/the-founding-of-the-communio-internationalis-benedictinarum/paperback/product-23921857.html> and click on “Add to Cart.” If you have any problem with this link, simply go to www.lulu.com and enter Scholastika Häring in the search bar. It only costs \$20 US Dollars plus shipping.

We are very excited that this important work is now available in two languages. (This is only the beginning. French and Spanish translations are also hoped for! If anyone wants translation into other languages, please let me know who to contact to try to accomplish this.) We believe Scholastika's book will provide all the regions of the world a better understanding of our present, and our hopes for our

future. It is important for us to better know our history which includes the courageous and enthusiastic work of many Benedictine women throughout the world. Each monastery is urged to order at least one copy for its monastic library and one for those in initial formation.

You are invited to share your ideas in re-imagining the future of the CIB. How would you like to see the CIB evolve? Please share with me (lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com) your thoughts. The more specific your suggestions the greater possibility they will take root in the CIB.

As we try to build up the *communio* in the CIB regions, **we hope that the delegate of each region will send out this letter to the monasteries of her region.** Also, through the CIB website (noted above), we hope to promote news in each region of the world. The only way we can do that is if each delegate sends us news from their region. This might be about elections of new abbesses/prioresses as well as new CIB delegates, special monastery anniversaries, the ways monasteries are ministering in their areas, etc. Also, please let me know if there is interest in starting a CIB Facebook page.

A big THANK YOU to Sister Judith Ann Heble, the immediate past Moderator of the CIB, and to the Administrative Council who served through the 2018 CIB Symposium. Much of their work happened “behind the scenes.” But we know that their work was important to the ongoing work of this amazing international organization of Benedictine women. A special word of gratitude to Judith Ann, who tirelessly served as Moderator for the last 12 years, and who worked for many years in CIB before that. She made everything look easy!

Let us all pray for one another. Let us all continue to pray for peace, compassion and understanding in our world. In these next four years of service to the CIB, the members of the Administrative Council and I hope that we can meet many more Benedictine women throughout the world. Please help us make CIB known in every region. Be sure to encourage those in your region to share news with the rest of the CIB world by submitting news items for the CIB website. You may contact me through email at lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com.

In hope, I am your sister,



Sister Lynn McKenzie, OSB
CIB Moderator

P.S. Soon I hope to have posted on the CIB website a summary of the CIB Symposium participants' evaluations.