



Franciscan Sisters Congregational JPIC Newsletter

Vol. 7, No. 1

February 2022

Malawi: Renewing Hope—Renewing the Environment

By Sr. Raynelda Saragih

The Sisters had a Christmas party with the Priests and staff members of St Francis Catholic Primary School. The Christmas party was done while observing the covid 19 preventive measures. It was a nice moment of sharing and dining together while celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Gifts were given to every staff member and to the priests. These included sugar, soft drinks, peanut butter, rice, cooking oil, tea leaves, just to mention a few. This was done to show the spirit of love and care for each other.



Sisters and Priests celebrating Christmas with the staff members



Staff meeting while observing Covid measures

" Covid 19 is real, let's always remember to mask up, observe social distance and use hand sanitizer, stay safe"



Some of the gifts offered to the staff

Our Parish Welcomes a New Priest



It was a nice moment in our beloved parish in Madisi. A new parish priest arrived and Christmas was a special celebration, expressing the people's happiness through their beautiful liturgical singing and dancing up to the end of the program. Joy was everywhere and the gift of a new priest for our parish was a very special Christmas gift.

Our School



Our school is appreciated by many people. That is why at the beginning of each academic year we receive many new students. This teacher, teaching the children how to write the letters of the alphabet,

is just beginning to open the door of learning for them. Being a caring school, St Francis pays school fees for 100 orphans in different secondary schools around Madisi. During the holidays the orphans help in school gardens, planting maize, vegetables, soy and pumpkins.

secondary school students planting maize



Environment-- *"Let's take care for our environment"*



As one way of controlling the unnecessary cutting down of trees for firewood, the Sisters provide free Bamboo trees to the Christian families, 25 trees for each family. This is done so that the families can rely on themselves in terms of firewood by using the Bamboos after they grow. These are a fast-growing source of fuel wood. This has lessened the careless cutting down of other trees that are needed to stabilize the soil and lessen flooding during heavy rainfall.



Families planting bamboo trees near Madisi

Germany: The Spirit of the Season—Giving and Receiving!

By Sr. Alexandra Völzke

Focus on the elderly and their needs



In our old people's home St. Franziskus in Beringhausen, our residents are happy about the new "Bike Labyrinth". The Bike Labyrinth is a system that allows people to take virtual, interactive bike rides through cities and natural landscapes at home and abroad. The screen on which the bike tours are shown is connected to a movement trainer. In this way, the seniors can be "on the road" despite restrictions, train their coordination and experience other places virtually. Another big advantage: while the residents can drive actively according to their abilities, the device can also be set so that the trainee is not actively kicking himself/herself but moving and thus mobilized. In this way, former travel destinations can be visited virtually again and again, and there is a lot to talk about with each other afterwards. What an exciting way to "get out and enjoy life!"



Mrs. Anna Reichel from the weaning station for birds of prey & owls had brought a young tawny owl with her, which came to the Vogel station injured in the spring. Now he is healthy and strong enough to be able to lead a life in freedom. After the animal was introduced to the seniors, the tawny owl was released into freedom.

Technical assistance systems can be very helpful for the everyday life of older people and can also partially relieve caregivers if the technology is useful and accepted. What was necessary for this was the subject of a study project "**Assistance Systems in Everyday Life**" from April to September 2021 under the direction of Prof. Dr. Kirsten Thommes from the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Paderborn.

For this research project, Franciscan nuns, Poor Clares and residents of our St. Clara retirement home took part in an experiment and several interviews. The subject of the experiment was an electronic tablet box with an alarm made available to the nurses and residents participating in the study. It turned out that



some aspects of the design and use of the functions for older people needed to be revised. The subjective usefulness seems particularly important, as well as the ease of use. If this is the case, assistance systems are integrated into everyday life and can support older people so that they can live independently in their familiar environment for longer. In this context, Provincial Superior Sr. M. Angela Benoit also suggested a connection to the other research project currently underway in the St. Clara retirement home, which is about promoting and strengthening a good community. Cooperation partners here are the Department of Nursing Science at Witten/Herdecke University and the Welfare Foundation NRW.



At the beginning of December, 24 primary school children from the Liborius School in Salzkotten were with us and left the residents of St. Clara with lovely Advent greetings. As part of the German lessons, the children dealt with the topic of "letters" and had the idea of making residents of our institution happy. They painted pictures and wrote letters on the theme of "Christmas and Advent". Some residents who were present at the delivery of the letters, were very happy about the surprise and promised to answer the children.

The annual five days of Christmas market celebration in St. Clara included many attractions. Sisters and residents were able to enjoy waffles, crepes, sausages, and other delicacies as well as punch and mulled wine. The culinary offerings were accompanied by a varied program. On Monday, St. Nicholas was in our facility with his servant Ruprecht. He reviewed the past year with all the celebrations, experiences, and activities.



On Tuesday, the Power Girls danced and thrilled us with a sense of rhythm and beautiful choreography. On Wednesday, children of the St. Martin Kindergarten came to visit and played a short play for our residents.



On Thursday, the offspring of the fire brigade music train of the volunteer fire brigade thrilled everyone with wonderful Christmas songs. Afterwards, flag-waving women enchanted the audience with a fire torch show. Our residents were able to watch the show from their rooms and were thrilled. The conclusion of the five-day celebration on Friday was a performance by the Hussar Trumpet Corps. The music of the wind instruments was not only easy to hear in the courtyard, but also delighted all the residents and all the sisters of the motherhouse.

Sr. M. Alexa and Sr. M. Lucia brought last year's wooden nativity figures for the outdoor crib back to a high gloss and renewed the texts. They also invited others to help shape things. So, the children of the Kita St. Martin made a star, and the outside crib could shine again in the garden.



This year there were small and big people who did not forget the poor and packed beautiful packages for Romania. The campaign "**Christmas in a shoebox**" enjoys great popularity and connects groups and people with each other, beyond our country. A big thank you to everyone who helped with packing and transporting to Romania.

After it had to be cancelled completely last year, the carolers visited us once again. The residents of St. Clara and the sisters of the motherhouse could enjoy their singing in the courtyard and in front of the sacristy. We then exchanged good words, blessings, as well as our donations and sweets. We are very pleased that we were able to support this action that benefits the health care of children in several African countries.



Netherlands: From Inspiration To Action

By Mirjam Wolthuis

Living in times of COVID

It is the same old story: Covid forced us to limit our activities and especially, to allow fewer people from outside into the convent. Although for many sisters the COVID restrictions did not make much difference because they did not go to the theatre or restaurant anyway, it is sad for everyone not to be able to be close to family members in case of illness or death. Whenever possible, funerals are attended via a live stream, and sometimes, fortunately, attendance in a small circle is possible. Our prayers therefore continue for all those who are suffering emotionally or economically as a result of this situation and all those who bear responsibility during this pandemic.

End of year meeting

It is the tradition in Klooster Alverna to have a big gathering with all sisters, residents, board members, employees, and volunteers one week before Christmas. This year that could not take place with so many people. So, the meeting was held only with sisters. It was not allowed to sing Christmas carols at this gathering because of aerosols, so two members of staff sang a song together. Not a big choir, but just a duet made everyone quiet and attentive. Covid once again made it clear to us that the small and delicate can be just as impressive. It just requires a different kind of attention. During this meeting, Pastor Marlies read a special Christmas story: On a wall in the city center, someone wrote with a spray can, "all foreigners should leave the country". Then the chocolate bars from Brazil said, "we will leave." And the artichokes from Ecuador followed. The Corona beer from Mexico also gathered its things and left. And so on and so forth. For two pages, Marlies told how all the parts, ingredients, and raw materials from 'abroad' moved in a long procession back to their native soil. The next morning the whole country fell silent and everything fell apart, because the balance was completely disturbed. This story made a big impression on us. We engaged in conversation and looked around us to realize how much we depend on other countries where other hands make things and food possible for us.

At the end, Sister Auxiline thanked all the staff (not present) for their efforts in the past year. With the agreement of the sisters, the annual Christmas gift did not go to the sisters themselves but to two organizations in Haarlem, one for the reception of refugees and one for the reception of the homeless. It made the sisters happy to be able to do this.



Every Thursday morning, Marlies and Mirjam take turns leading a Bible meeting in the chapel. We read the scriptures for the coming Sunday and discuss them. Almost always, the theme of the readings brings us to the question of how our faith and prayer can be meaningful in all the war and anger in the world. We want to preserve the

Light and pass it on. By continuing to talk to each other about this, we relieve the heaviness of these times a little. In this way, we can continue forward with courage and hope.

Talking about hope, this picture shows a beautiful composition of sunflowers painted by our sisters on St Francis day. It shows unity in diversity, and a shared orientation toward the Light. That the sunflower is also the logo of the General Chapter is, of course, no coincidence.



**Romania: When we receive, we have full hands,
But when we give, we have full hearts!**

By S. M. Lydia Fechetă



When I read these words, they seemed to be the right words to describe the time between the Feast of St. Francis and Mother Clara and Christmas. It was a time of preparing to give and receive. Give — receive: it is like a balance between action and contemplation, prayer and facts. Our mission has its source in prayer for others and for ourselves. Deep moments of prayer were experienced on the 2nd November for our sisters, relatives and benefactors who were called home by the Lord in the last 12 months. We are thankful for the lives of all we knew and who brought God's love to shine in our souls.

Many full hearts started wonderful charity actions for the people in need in Caransebes, and surrounding areas, especially for children and sick, elderly people.



An important action is “*Christmas in a Shoebox*”. Before Christmas is the giving of presents for children and teenagers in need, which we get from different groups in Germany, sent by the sisters in Salzkotten to bring joy here. In December we received more than 400 gifts. A great *Thank you!* to all. The joy and happiness were tremendous, especially from the children in our Kindergarten and in the primary school, where they also received a warm meal. We received many words of thanks from the children, and every time the joy was expressed on their faces we were also moved by overwhelming gratitude.



A donation truck of food came from firemen in Niederrhein, Germany, and so we could give to the families in need in Caransebes. More than 200 bags of basic food we distributed, many of them to families in the Homecare station, to people who clean up the street and to garbage workers.





For all our actions before Christmas, for all the support we got, and for everything, we thanked the Lord in prayer on 31st December at midnight. The beginning of the New Year 2022 is a great occasion to entrust our past to the mercy of God and to receive God's blessing for our future.



We also brought our gratitude for the love from our sisters in Germany, for all groups who organized the action in shoeboxes, for all who made possible the joy that came to the children and people in need in Caransebes. May God's blessings come to everybody in the new year and in each moment of our lives.

Pace e bene!

< [Winter sunset in Romania](#)

USA: Keeping Our Faith Community Engaged During Covid-19

By S Beatrice Hernandez

The Laudato Si Action Platform (LSAP) public commitment statement from our St Clare Regional Community was made on the feast of St. Francis. On November 12th, a press release was sent to local TV and print news outlets to share our commitment to implementing the values of Laudato Si. We linked our commitment statement to our 2022 year-long anniversary celebration of 75 years in Wheaton and 150 years in the USA. Our LSAP page on the Wheaton Franciscan website is now up and running. Our LSAP planning team continues discerning next steps for our region in moving forward towards a flourishing future full of hope, as we care for Mother Earth. In her new book with Doug Abrams, author and naturalist Jane Goodall writes, “Hope is what enables us to keep going in the face of adversity. It is what we desire to happen, but we must be prepared to work hard to make it so.... Hope involves envisioning the future while recognizing the inevitability of the challenges ... real hope requires action and engagement.” (*The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide to Trying Times*)

In November, the USA celebrated Thanksgiving, a time of giving thanks for all the blessings we have received. In collaboration with Team Rubicon Disaster Response, the Wheaton Franciscans held a drive-up donation collection for Afghan refugee families temporarily being housed at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Our faith community (over 80 people who prior to covid worshiped with us on Sunday at our motherhouse chapel) generously donated socks, baby diapers, clothes, and other needed items. These were then taken to Indiana by covenant companion Paige Samdal to assist the refugees as they build new lives in the US.



The advent season theme this year was “A new time is upon us—a great hope is before us—the Light has embraced us.” For the first time since March 2020, we were able to welcome our faith community back into the motherhouse chapel because the covid infection rate was declining. All attendees were vaccinated and masked, thus ensuring safety as much as possible. For those unable to join us, we had a drive-up advent bag pickup. In the bag were “Jesse Tree” ornaments—each with a scripture quote. These

could be cut out and hung on the family Christmas tree at home. The bag also included a tree blessing ritual for families to use, as well as a special advent calendar, inviting acts of kindness each day.



For Christmas we invited the faith community to join the Wheaton Franciscans in spreading comfort and joy to the residents of Canticle Place (low-income housing for people disabled by HIV/AIDS) and Bethany House (housing for young women refugees and asylum seekers), by donating \$25 gifts cards. These were then put into Christmas cards for distribution to the 30 residents. Because of the overwhelming generosity of participants, we were able to provide two gift cards to each resident, as well as some

cards to each facility director to help serve the future needs of the residents. Through these Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas activities, we were able to keep our faith community connected to us, as well as serving people in need.

Unfortunately, prior to Christmas, the covid pandemic in the US began to worsen again. For the safety of our sisters living at the motherhouse, we again made the difficult decision to close the motherhouse to the general public. On Christmas Eve, the liturgical celebration was available on livestream, although the Sisters and Covenant Companions were able to attend, vaccinated and masked. After Christmas, even tighter restrictions are in place, with the Mass attended only by the sisters who live at the motherhouse. The rest of us join them via livestream. We are hopeful that we will soon be able to be with one another in person and with our entire faith community. That day will truly be a blessing and a cause for much celebration.



We wish you a New Year 2022 filled with Hope, Peace and Love



Indonesia: Manufacturing Eco-Enzymes—A Christmas Gift to Mother Earth

By Sr. Verena Sianturi

The implementation of the Eco-Enzyme manufacturing program in the run-up to Advent and Christmas was just a matter of remembering during the Christmas preparation period that there are many things that need to be prepared. In addition to following the zoom program of several networks that have become partners, we also had meetings that were very time consuming. We are continuing the previous program, namely the creation of Eco-Enzyme, including manufacturing training. On November 19, 2021, in the hall of the novitiate at Greccio community, we conducted training for novices on how to make Eco-Enzymes. First Sr. Verena explained the slide module about how to make Eco-Enzyme before practicing it.



After delivering and explaining the material about the manufacture of Eco-Enzymes and their uses, the novices immediately practice how to make them. Each of the sisters was very enthusiastic about working on the



eco-enzyme manufacturing process with materials that had previously been prepared. So far, the amount of Eco-Enzyme that has been produced by Sr. Verena is 1,101 liters (1.1 tons) while the amount of organic waste used was 325 kg.

The results of this Eco-Enzyme project are shared with the surrounding community, pastors, and some sisters from other congregations who do not know how to make their own Eco-Enzymes. By doing this,

we introduce Eco-Enzymes and their use to others, with the aim of interesting people in participating in processing of organic waste into eco-enzymes. In this way, we have indirectly animated the community to care for the environment and participate in caring for and protecting the earth from the dangers of waste. On January 14, 2022, Sr. Verena invited the local government officials, namely the Head of Environment, to come to the community to discuss the environmental situation of the local community. On that occasion we shared ideas and possible solutions for the development of the surrounding community, while also caring for the environment. In the discussion we were very open and agreed to create an activity program that would raise awareness of environmental care by providing training for the manufacture of Eco-Enzyme. However, this program did not continue because on January 18 Sr. Verena was transferred to another Community. We hope that a way will be found to continue the program.
