

# BETHANY LAND INSTITUTE

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2021 Annual Report



# Dear Friends

What a year it has been, both across the world and here at BLI. It has been a year of gifts and struggles. A year of growth and setbacks. A year of celebrations and mourning.

In early March, BLI was in full swing, as its first cohort of Caretakers arrived on campus and immediately immersed themselves in the practice of Integral Ecology. They were joined by 14 seminarians sent by the Kasana-Luwero Diocese as part of their ongoing commitment to *Laundato Si'*.

However, in June, COVID-19 cases surged across the country, and the government imposed a strict lockdown, closing all institutions of learning. The majority of Caretakers were able to remain on campus to care for the land and animals (although not participate in classroom work), but the seminarians were forced to return to their homes. During this surge in COVID-19 cases, BLI suffered a great loss. BLI Co-founder, Father Anthony “Zachary” Rweza, passed away on June 15 due to complications from the virus. He was one of the visionaries behind BLI, a fearless leader, a loving priest, and a caring friend. Although this loss was felt deeply by all members of the BLI family, it did not discourage us from forging forward. If anything, it reaffirmed our commitment to pursuing a life of Integral Ecology and care for creation—for the world and for Father Zach.

By fall, COVID-19 cases slowed, and the Caretakers were able to resume classroom lessons. They even took a short field trip to different farms around Uganda to continue to grow in their ability to care for our land.

I was able to visit the BLI campus myself for a few weeks in July, and I was amazed by all that was happening. The Caretakers expressed such passion and love for Integral Ecology, excitedly showing me all the operations around campus. I was also impressed by the sense of family I found. Despite coming from different backgrounds and being at different stages of life, the Caretakers joked with one another, played games together, and supported each other. The staff joined in on this too, and it was clear that BLI had become a home away from home for many.

Therefore, I write today with great hope for the coming year. We have big plans and exciting things happening. But more importantly, we have each other, and I know that we will be able to face anything that comes our way, together, as the BLI family.

Father Emmanuel



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# In Memory



Father Anthony Zachary Rweza, one of the three co-founders of BLI, passed away on June 15, 2021. His legacy lives on at BLI. The following poem was written by Fr. Joseph Ssebunya in his honor.

## *FARE THEE WELL, FR. ZACH*

*Fare-thee-well, Fr. Zach*

*Rare was your name, to match your character.  
All kids would jeer, at the mention of 'Zakaria'.  
Yet all would cheer at the humour that oozed,  
from a Zach so dear.*

*Fare-thee-well Fr. Zach*

*A friend so rare.*

*So easy to relate, with both young and the old,  
With a smile so warm and welcoming to all.*

*More friends than foes you made,  
of all castes and creeds.*

*Ever open, ever true, yet all races you embraced.  
How we'll miss thy company: with fun, laugh and dine.*

*Fare-thee-well Fr. Zach*

*A priest so rare.*

*Not the habit you doned but thy heart,  
revealed the priestly soul within.*

*Zeal for souls, like Christ you had.*

*Rich and Poor to thee they fled,  
Seeking help and counsel in life.*

*None returned from thee unattended.*

*Fare-thee-well, Fr. Zach*

*An entrepreneur so rare.*

*Gifted by God, you generously gave:  
Hardwork, honesty, creativity and thrift.*

*Business acumen rare to find.*

*All you gave to serve your Church.*

*Great was the mind that humbly steered,  
a self-reliant local Church in modern time.*

*Fare-thee-well, Fr. Zach*

*A memory so rare.*

*Not in stone is your name inscribed;  
Neither Church wall nor building is tall enough,  
Your great legacy to uphold.*

*Into the hearts and minds of the many lives  
Touched by your deeds and generous heart.  
Your lasting memory will always remain engraved.  
Time immemorial never forgotten.*

*Fare-thee-well Fr. Zach*

*A child of God so beloved.*

*You trod the path willed for thee by God.  
You heeded the call of your Master.*

*You erred like all humans do.*

*But run the race with faith to the end.*

*Meet thee now the Merciful face,  
of thy Judge and saviour Lord.*

*In the bosom of Mary thy Mother*

*Hear thy Patron Zachary sing his song:*

*"Blessed be ...God of Israel, ...*

*He has visited his people and redeemed them...*

*The loving kindness of our God...*

*He will give light to those ...in the  
shadow of death...and guide us in the way of peace"  
(Lk. 1:67-79)*

*And once at home with all the saints.*

*Forget us not Fr. Zach our friend.*

*So soon we too with you shall be.*

*REST IN PEACE FATHER ZACH.*

# The Caretakers: BLI Officially Welcomes the Next Generation of Ugandan Leaders

In February 2021, Bethany Land Institute officially welcomed its first cohort of Caretakers. Ranging from ages 15 to 28, sixteen Caretakers came to BLI from diverse backgrounds and multiple villages across Uganda. While some have postsecondary degrees in agriculture-related subjects, others have little formal education, as expensive school fees forced them to drop out before even finishing their primary years. However, all of the Caretakers have one thing in common: a love for our Earth. This diverse cohort was joined by 14 seminarians from the local Kasana-Luweero Diocese. As part of their commitment to living out Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, the Diocese has agreed to regularly send its seminarians to live alongside the Caretakers at BLI, helping them learn how to truly live out and practice Integral Ecology.





In June, the COVID-19 crisis put a halt to the classroom portion of BLI's work as schools and training centers were required to shut down in Uganda. However, the large majority of Caretakers stayed on campus to take care of the crops and animals. Older Caretakers continued to give informal lessons in the fields every day, and the younger Caretakers continued to rotate through different sections of BLI to ensure they had exposure to every department. Classes started back up again in the fall.

While working in the fields and classrooms takes a lot of the Caretakers' time, their evenings are often filled with socialization and games. The Caretakers' have formed a Liturgical Committee and can be heard practicing their choir songs late into the evening. They also organized a community soccer tournament this past fall, gathering people from the surrounding villages for a friendly competition. They also regularly play volleyball, Phase 10, and Uno with each other, filling the campus with constant laughter and joy. We could not be more proud of the community the Caretakers have built here at BLI, and we look forward to seeing all the innovative, unique, and special things to come.

# 2021 in Numbers

**400**

kilograms of beans harvested  
at the BLI Kiwumpa site during  
the summer 2021 harvest

**16**

Caretakers trained  
at BLI in 2021

**63,834**

trees planted in BLI's lifetime

**33,384**

trees planted in 2021

**4**

baby goats were  
born at BLI in 2021

**3**

local school partnerships established: St.  
John's Secondary School, St. Theresa's Primary  
School, and St. Mary's Primary School

**367**

total acreage of BLI's campus

**100**

chicks raised at BLI  
in 2021

**1 million**

trees will be planted by BLI by 2050

The BLI dormitories  
built in 2021 can house

**32**

Caretakers

**244**

acres of protected forest



**ONE BLI FAMILY**

# Practicing Hospitality: BLI Welcomes Sanyu Maria and Kirabo Emma

In July, BLI got a special visit from Father Emmanuel and two guests. Maria Orjales Riberas and Emma Ziegler, two recent graduates of the University of Notre Dame, came to BLI for a few weeks to live and learn alongside the Caretakers. While there, Maria and Emma joined the Caretakers for all meals, played sports and games with them in the evenings, and even sometimes ventured out into the field with them to work with the crops or animals.

Additionally, Maria and Emma had their own tasks to complete, tasks that lined up with their interests and prior experiences. Together, they worked on creating a data management system to record all of BLI's farming operations—farm inputs, outputs, costs, etc. Additionally, they collected photo and video content, surveyed local villagers on energy and plastic use, and used their perspective as outsiders to examine BLI's current operations and make suggestions for future innovations or improvements.



However, despite the knowledge and gifts Maria and Emma offered to BLI, they found they received more from the Institute and its people than they could ever give back. From the agricultural knowledge shared by Caretakers to the generosity of local villagers to the laughs and memories that still make them smile, Maria and Emma feel their time at BLI can be characterized by one term: reciprocal accompaniment. As Emma stated after she returned to the U.S., “The gifts the Caretakers gave to us came in many forms: friendship, comfort, laughter, knowledge... They shared with us, and we shared with them. We were in the journey together.”

Maria echoed this sentiment, adding, “Bethany Land Institute became a home and a family during the short period of time that I spent there.” Despite leaving campus in late July, Maria and Emma remain greatly connected to BLI. In November, Maria returned to BLI’s campus to work on community outreach and Martha’s Market. She plans to stay for two years in Nandere. Emma, on the other hand, lives in the US, but stays connected through WhatsApp and video calling. She also serves as the communications officer for BLI.





## 2014

Land acquisition. Clarifying conversations in Uganda and the United States.



## 2016

Engineering Missions International develops master campus plan. BLI incorporated in the U.S. as a 501(c)3.



## 2018

Staff formation program launched. Multiple board meetings. David and Susan join staff. More fundraising.



## 2020

Campus construction. First caretakers recruited. Sylvester joins as BLI Director and Chris as Forester.

## 2015

Surveying the land. Farmhouse constructed. Hired four BLI workers. Incorporated BLI in Uganda.

## 2017

Fundraising for Phase 1 of campus construction. Simon and Julius join the staff.

## 2019

Five year plan created. Curriculum developed. Kasana Luwero Diocese awards BLI 160 acres of land. Fr. Joseph joins as Administrator.

## 2021

Two dormitories and Mary's Hall completed. First cohort of Caretakers arrives on campus. Programming begins.

# THE JOURNEY

# Leadership



**President**  
Father Emmanuel  
Katongole



**Director**  
Sylvestor Kule



**Coordinator**  
Simon Nyombi



**Lazarus Forest Director**  
Chris Mukwaya



**Martha's Market Director**  
Cissy Nasaki



**Mary's Farm Director**  
Evelyn Nambooze

## Board of Directors

Father Hilary Muheezangango - *Chairman*

Margaret K. Sakwa - *Secretary*

Father James Kabonghe

Father Joseph Nnyanzi Kakooza

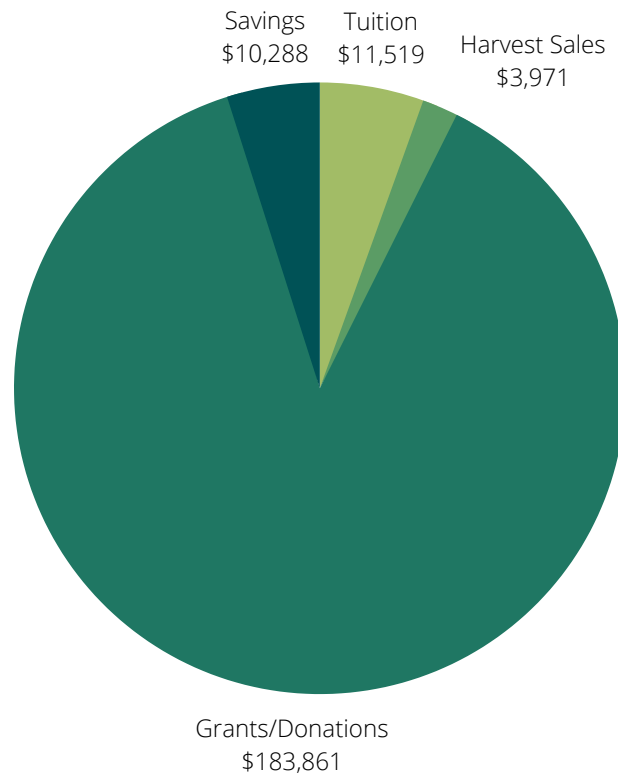
Josephine Kizza

Christine Flora Kizito

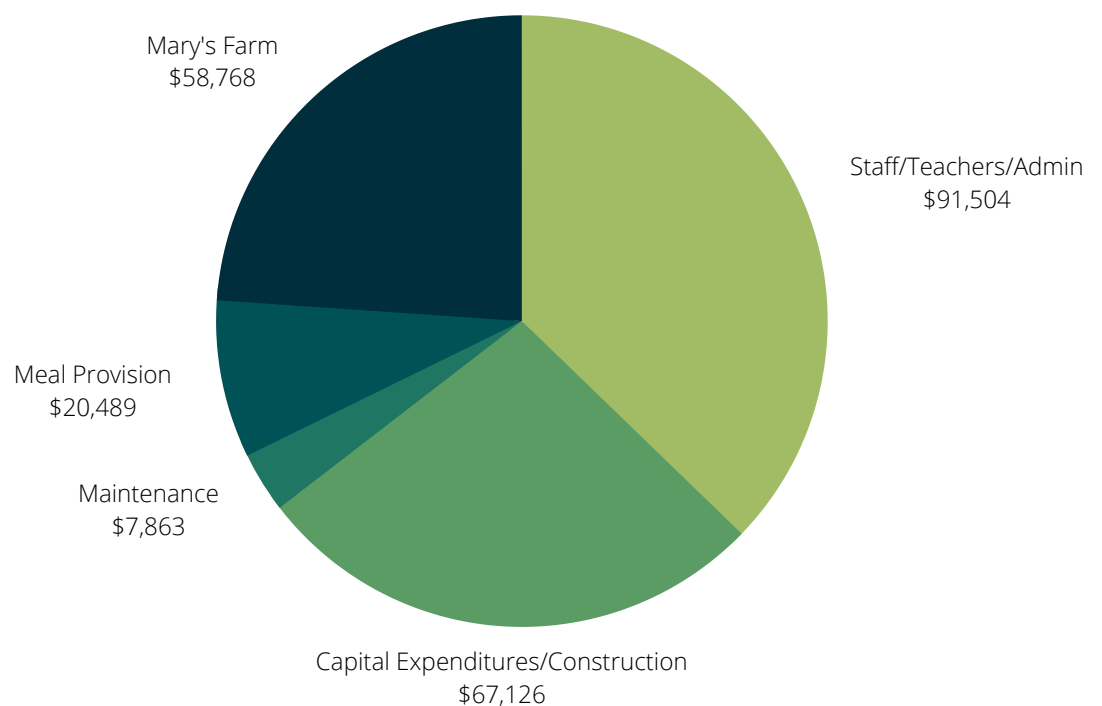


# FINANCIALS

## Revenue



## Expenses



# Looking Ahead: What will happen at BLI in 2022?

While 2021 brought many gifts to BLI, we believe 2022 will do just the same, if not to a greater extent. Below are some major events BLI has planned for 2022.

- The completion of St. Francis House on BLI's campus. This will serve as a retreat center for inner conversation, renewal, and discovery. It will include internal guest rooms for visitors, a chapel, an administrator residence, and an attached, two-story dormitory to house larger groups. It will be surrounded by a garden, overlooking the forest.
- The official launch of the BLI Caretaker Program. While the Caretakers have been on campus for some time now, we have not had the opportunity to officially celebrate this milestone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to improved conditions, BLI plans to host a celebration on July 29, 2022 (the official feast day of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus). We hope to bring friends of BLI from around the world to celebrate our work and our love for creation.
- The beginning of the second cohort of Caretakers. More Caretakers will be joining the current Caretakers in the coming months. This will be the institute's second cohort, and like the first, they will reside in the on-campus dormitories, participate in lessons in the classrooms and fields, and live alongside the first cohort. BLI staff has already started recruiting for this cohort.



# With Gratitude, Thank You

BLI has been blessed with many gifts over the past year. Despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, BLI can say that we are no longer just a vision; we are a living, breathing entity, full of individuals working every day to transform rural Uganda. For this past year, our Caretakers have toiled every day in the fields, and we are beginning to see the fruits of their labor: crops are being harvested, animals are returning to the forest, local communities are learning the importance of caring for our environment. Already, BLI is creating an impact on rural Uganda. But it is not just our Caretakers and staff who have made this vision a reality; it is all of you. Whether you have followed our story, donated money or resources, or shared the joy of Integral Ecology with friends and family, your support has enabled us to grow into the institute we are today. As they say, it takes a village, and we are so blessed to have a global village of dedicated individuals joining us on this journey. We look forward to marching forward, together.



