



SOCIETAS
SACRATISSIMI
CORDIS JESU

Bétharran



Towards
the **General**
Chapter
2017

Dossier for community reflection

O Virgin Mary, you welcomed with joy
the call to be the Mother of God and our Mother too.
You took the road without delay,
to bring the Good News to your cousin Elizabeth.
At Cana, you told your Son Jesus...
what people needed for the wedding feast to continue.
At the foot of the cross, you stood by Him,
taking your place, without complaint,
without begging to change your position...
sharing fully in the mission of your Son.
In the Upper Room,
you prayed with all the disciples, for the Holy Spirit;
and they became courageous witnesses throughout the world.
In your motherly tenderness, look upon us your sons,
the Religious of Betharram, journeying to the General Chapter.
We wish to imitate and manifest in our community
the generous spirit of the Heart of Your Son.
Help us, religious and laity, to be eager and happy missionaries;
may we have the courage to respond to the challenges of today's world
through love, without delay, without reserve, without turning back.
Amen.

complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way".
I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking
the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their
respective communities.

Questions for community sharing

- As religious people, community, vicariate, what of these dimensions of the mission do we live? Which progress can we do?
- What options can we choose as a Region, as a Congregation? What can we share? What can we receive?

3. A Church which "goes forth"

Evangelii Gaudium -

20. In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth". Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.
21. The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: "Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out" (Mk 1:38). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns.
23. The Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; "communion and mission are profoundly interconnected". In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear.
24. The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.(...) An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.
33. Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the

Betharram Communities in a Church "which goes forth"

Rome, 14 March 2016

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

Here we are full in the heart of Lent which is a way to purify ourselves and renew our Baptism as we celebrate Easter. With this letter another path is open before us: the preparation of the 27th General Chapter which will be held at San Bernardino (Vicariate of Paraguay) from 6 to 24 May 2017.

With the consent of my Council, I decided to summon the 27 General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram in the place and on the date mentioned above (RV 182: st 9). We have also decided to name the Council of the Congregation as the "Working Commission" as laid down in statute No 10 of our Rule of Life.

We have decided to celebrate the feast of St Michael Garicoits on the 14 May 2017 with the laity of the three Vicariates which are part of Father Auguste Etchecopar Region. We shall celebrate Mass in the morning, we shall have lunch together and then we shall take the time to listen to what they want to tell us. In this particular Region there are a lot of people who share our mission. Without them Betharram would be unable to bring its mission to a happy conclusion particularly in the realm of education.

In our discussions with the Working Commission we decided to stress the Betharramite mission; what are its principal characteristics? "We don't have specific good works" said Fr Davignau to those who were consulting him in 1968. Our mission can be summed up in every type of ministry: education, parochial ministry, health, spiritual direction, accompanying groups, popular missions, but cannot be identified with any one of them. Rather than a particular ministry the mission of Betharram is more like a way of working marked by the spirit of obedience; this is what keeps us free, available, capable of leaving everything, no matter how competent we may be, "to leave immediately" for wherever

the Superiors may call us.

St Michael, quoted in article 15 of the Rule of Life, has this to say: "the aim of our Society is not so much to preach, hear confessions or teach, etc., as to form men well disposed to perform these ministries worthily when the bishop or leader of the Society asks them. The object of the Society is then to train and form these ministers so perfectly that at the first signal of the will of their bishop or superior they can be worthily chosen to work for the salvation of souls".

Pope Francis made me reflect on this when he spoke about the synodal dimension of the Church in his talk on 17 October 2015. As you know the word "synod" means "walking together", "advancing together". This idea is one of the most precious heritages of Vatican II. Everybody knows how necessary, exacting, beneficial and beautiful it is to "advance together".

As consecrated souls even though the mission may scatter us worldwide, our particular way of life consists in "walking together". That demands that we listen to each other in fraternal communities, in assemblies of the Vicariate, in Regional and General Chapters, and in Councils. Then we must listen to the people to "the point of feeling in them and with them what is God's will for us to set out". We must also listen to the priests, to pastoral agents, the Bishops' Conference, the Holy Father.

"We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives." (EG 171).

Our communities will be meaningless if we don't communicate what is essential in our eyes and if we don't listen to what our brother wants to tell us. Without communication and without listening there can be no meeting possible between brothers, so much so that communities become hotel lodgings for residents. How could we be agents of the culture of meeting others, if fraternity which

little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Questions for community sharing

- In what way do these quotations question me?
- What do they tell me about the mission?
- What do they require from a religious of Betharram?

2. Saint Michael and the mission in America

Historical reference - Mission in 1856

Questions for community sharing

- What were the steps of this mission (call, need, discernment, decision, sending-out, carrying-out, development)?
- What did this require from all those who were send out?
- From the Congregation's point of view, what is our "America" today?

IDENTIFY THE BETHARRAMITE MISSION

1. The mission of Jesus and his disciples

Manifesto of the founder - the mission of the Incarnate Word: «At the moment He entered the world animated by the Spirit of God His Father, He gave Himself up to all God's designs for Him; He took the place of all victims; He said: "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: 'Here I am, I have come to do your will, O my God.'" (cf. Psalm. 39).

Jesus began His life's work by this great act which he never discontinued. From this moment onward he remained always in a state of sacrificial offering, annihilated before God. He did nothing on His own; His actions were always directed by the Spirit of God; His disposition was one of constant abandonment to the orders of God, to suffer and do whatever He wanted: "Exinanivit semetipsum, factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis" (He emptied himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.) (Ph. 2, 6-11)

Mk 6,7-13 - idoneus, expeditus, expositus : Then he summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

Mt 11, 25-30 - the « style » of the One who is sent out by the Father: At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to

is supposed to be typical of religious life doesn't find a way into our communities by a genuine and deep sense of communication amongst ourselves?

We are all brothers "marching together" towards our meeting with Christ, the Lord, in the Church and in the Congregation. Within it no one can dominate the others. On the contrary in the Congregation as in the Church someone must "lower himself" to be at the service of his brethren throughout the entire journey. The Congregation like the Church is an upturned pyramid the tip of which is beneath the foundations. This is why those who hold positions of authority are called "ministers" because they are the least of all. Let us never forget that! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is that of the Cross.

It is fundamental to integrate this ecclesiology so much so that instead of being a source of division between Superiors and religious, like enemies clashing as they pursue opposing plans, we love each other like brothers, we watch over each other, we feel involved in the life and mission of every religious and every community. Finally, it is the only thing that matters in the Congregation. Superiors like any other religious are at the service of each brother, of each community, for the life and mission entrusted by the Church to the Congregation where so ever we have been mandated.

"Walking together", communication, listening and meeting are not contradictory with the "going forth" demanded by the mission. The spirituality of "going forth" is founded anthropologically but also theologically: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it" (Mk 8, 35). We cannot fulfil ourselves if we don't make this movement out: personal blooming is the recompense for the gift of self to others as part of service. "To go forth" means a willingness to go further afield, to bid farewell to our securities, to all that we have achieved, to go to places where there is still plenty of work to do, without being preoccupied for self, but looking out for the good still to be done on the outskirts. If we take a look at some of our actual implantations, especially the colleges, we began in the outskirts stripped of educational structures. Today however such works are in the heart of the city.

The General Chapter is a golden opportunity to "walk together"

in a precise place and for a short period of time so as “to see, judge and act” on the fidelity of Betharramites worldwide to the spirituality and mission entrusted by the Holy Spirit, to St Michael in the 19th century, and to us today. And after this short interlude, we shall resume our “walk together” in the missionary dispersion of our communities which is the reason for our consecration. It will be a time for listening to each other after a time for listening to the people and the Pastors, so as to find out in what direction to go in response to the Will of God which has assembled us. Every religious has played an active role in electing those delegates who will represent him in this listening and discerning exercise. Here all the votes are of equal value.

The preparation and celebration of the Chapter is a time of grace to intensify our listening to the Word of God and the life of those men who will listen to us; it will intensify also our prayer asking for the courage to do God’s Will and not that of those who are the best speakers, who have greatest influence or exciting ideas. It should also be a special time to practise the works of mercy showing what we really are.

The Commission has prepared material to help us pray, reflect, and share in our community meetings, assemblies, the Regional and General Chapters. We shall thus make sure that the delegates of all the religious will receive the strength, wisdom and light of the Holy Spirit in order to instil a fresh surge in our religious family for the next six years in fidelity to the Gospel of Mercy and to the men and women of our times. For this we are not alone; we can count on Our Lady of Betharram, on St Michael Garicoits, Fr Etchecopar and on all the Betharramites in heaven and on earth; they are interceding for us, so that those who embody the charism today may remain faithful to it and through their dynamism will draw others on the same path.

May we, in the light of this charism, remain united daily in the “Here I Am” of the Heart of Jesus.

We remain fraternally in this gentle, humble and obedient Heart.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj
Superior General

Questions for community sharing

I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. “Mere administration” can no longer be enough. (EG 25).

- Tell how your community feels about this desire of Pope Francis and how it lives it out.
- According to you, what is missing in the way we live out today evangelical fraternity?
- How can we combine the commitments towards the mission with those towards the community? When there are several missions within the community, can you manage to harmonize your mission with that of your brothers? How? How can we fight against the tendency to individualism and murmuring, “community terrorism”, which gradually destroys the fraternity? Can you manage today to harmonize the mission you are carrying out with the missionary mandate you have received from the congregation? Can you manage to save some time in order to respond to the calls of the life of the community, of the Vicariate, the Region and the Congregation? Tell us about your experience in this. What can you suggest to make fraternal life in community a place where one can live his vocation and mission in a significant way?

4 - Conclude with a moment of prayer.

Draw inspiration from Mk 4, 26-29. Saint Michael: «Success is no business of ours»... (DS § 235); Saint Michael himself did not see his dream come true (other examples: Charles de Foucault, no community during his life time...; Saint Benedict: problems with the community, poisoning attempt...)

what most hinders a journey in consecrated life. The individualistic trend is basically a way of not standing fraternity. St. John Berchmans used to say that for him the greatest penance was precisely community life. At times living in a community may be very difficult, but community life that is not lived well does not help to grow. The work, included the "apostolic" one, can become a flight from fraternal life. Someone who is not capable of community life is not fit for the religious life" (...) Community conflicts are necessary: to a certain extent, they must exist, as long as the community really lives sincere and loyal relationships. *This is life.* We can't dream of a community or any human group which is free of conflicts, and we must tolerate them. If in a community there are no conflicts, it means that something is missing. Real life says that conflict exists in all families and in all groups of people. And conflicts must be assumed: they must not be ignored. If covered, they create tension leading to explosion. A life without conflict is no life (...)

In any case, however, the conflict ought be accompanied (...) But how? I can think - says Pope Francis - of the story of young man, 22, who was deeply depressed. I'm not talking about a religious, but about a young man who lived with his mother who was a widow and washed the clothes of wealthy families. This young man was no longer going to work and lived dulled by alcohol. His mother could do nothing: every morning before going out she would simply look at him very tenderly.

This young man is now a successful person: he has overcome that crisis, because, in the end, the tender gaze of his mother gave him a shake. This is it, we must recall the tenderness, even a motherly tenderness. For example, think of the tenderness experienced by St. Francis. Tenderness helps to overcome conflicts. But if it is not enough, it can also be opportune to move into another community."

It is true, continued Pope Francis, at times we can be very cruel to each other. We are all tempted to criticize either because we think we are better or for some personal gain. Sometimes fraternity crisis are due to the fragility at a personal level, and in certain cases the help of a professional, a psychologist is required. We must not be afraid of that; we should not be afraid of necessarily falling into psychology. In any case, we must never act like managers when faced with a brother's conflict: instead our charity must reach out like a gentle touch." (Spadaro: *Wake up the world*)

Preparing the 27th General Chapter

1. Observing the reality:

- Sometimes, the community consists merely in living under the same roof, and gives little value to the meaning of fraternity: sharing life, faith, goods and mission. How much do you value your experience of fraternity?
- Some religious seem to be immersed in their pastoral activity. People consider them as professionals or officials, and not so much as men who want to communicate what they saw and heard in their encounter with Jesus. Do you feel at times that you experience a contradiction between being a witness and being an official?
- Missionary individualism. One can notice some inability to carry out the mission as a community. From this arises the following question: which motivation is the basis of our pastoral activity?
- It seems that as soon as we no longer identify the mission with the works, we are not able to find out the originality of the Betharramite mission. And yet...!

2. Proposed issues for the community meeting.

Our Vocation.

For us, community and mission go together.

Identifying the Betharramite mission.

3. How to use this material?

- Three meetings can be held as proposed.
- You can take the proposed material and divide it into several parts depending on the meetings you plan.
- A climate of prayer is what cannot be missing. It is only by being in front of our Creator and our Lord that we will be critical towards ourselves.
- A thorough examination of the circumstances of our personal life and of our community life and of the reasons that support our actions can neither be missing.
- To find help in the Rule of Life in order to revise our life.
- To share in a climate of fraternal trust what we believe in, what we feel, think and wish...
- With profound humility, to acknowledge our faults and to correct our brothers.

- To value the positive elements which we experience and let us rejoice for them.
- To share our views on the Vicariate, the Region and the Congregation.

4. To send proposals for the XXVII General Chapter.

With the consent of the community, a secretary can send the proposals to the "Commission in charge of the preparation of the General Chapter" (addressed to the Generalate House). It would be good also to send these proposals to the Regional Chapter and to submit them to the assembly of the Vicariate.

5. "Send out your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth."

listen to the superior's lecture , to share some news... Many still remember how Rev Fr Mirande made the canonical visitation of all mission posts, by walking along the trails in the mountain. This way of living the community requires that the members of the community agree on a few things, e.g the meeting dates, the issues to be dealt with, etc.

It is a community project.

Questions for community sharing

- > How do others see our mission... Do they notice any difference vis-a-vis the diocesan priests? Are we convinced that we carry out our mission in a different way?
- > How can we sustain and keep a peculiar missionary spirit?
 - a) To refer to prayer (personal & community prayer), to narratio fidei or to Lectio Divina.
 - b) Reciprocal support during the mission.
 - c) Being ready to share the mission.

3. What the Pope asks for with regard to fraternity

To live fraternity by «stroking conflicts»

The Synod on the New Evangelization had asked the religious to be witnesses to the humanizing power of the Gospel through fraternal life. Pope Francis recalled that on the previous day he had received a visit from the prior of Taizé, Brother Alois: "At Taizé there are Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran monks... They all really live a fraternal life. They are an impressive apostolic pole for young people. Fraternity has a great force of attraction, while illnesses of the fraternity have a destructive power. The temptation against fraternity is

VOCATION

The missionaries were given special care by P. Garicoits:

- ▲ They would gather once a year for a retreat preached by Saint Michael himself;
- ▲ In addition to this, he used to gather them once a week for a spiritual lecture, which he hardly ever missed.
- ▲ They were used to go to his office before going to their mission. None of them would give up such a meeting in which Saint Michael used to give them many pieces of advice and clear instructions.
- ▲ They all would attend his moral theology course in which one could see among the students more elderly people, with white hair. (Mieyaa, Vol. III, 1043)
- ▲ Back from each mission, it is a tradition that every missionary go to him. With them he rejoiced for the success and sometimes for the triumphs. If they were discouraged because of the difficulties, disheartened by the failure, he found wonderful words which cheered up the mood and strengthened the will. He even often took note of their remarks. The meeting would not finish there. To each one who came to pay him a visit, he would ask about the behaviour in the church, in the parish house. They have to give an account of the development of the mission, the favourable or unfavourable circumstances, the results they achieved. The examination goes down to the smallest details. Sometimes, for greater accuracy, he also asks for a written report. He collects the information into a special notebook, the notebook of the missions. (Mieyaa: Vol. III, 1042).

2. The experience in Thailand - The Betharramite missionaries who were expelled from China, remained in Northern Thailand. And in those 60 years they have preached and organized the Christian life in the diocese of Chiang Mai. The Superior General of that time authorized them to live according to a traveling style in the various mountain locations because cohabitation was incompatible with the missionary work since the lack of roads system did not allow them to meet easily. But they were asked to spend one week together every one or two months in the Mission Centre in Chiang Mai. This gave them the opportunity to share experiences, to pray together, to live together, to

For morning prayer

1. Reading of Is. 6, 1-8:

¹ *In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; his train filled the sanctuary.*

² *Above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying;*

³ *and they were shouting these words to each other: Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth. His glory fills the whole earth.*

⁴ *The door-posts shook at the sound of their shouting, and the Temple was full of smoke.*

⁵ *Then I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth.'*

⁶ *Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding in its hand a live coal which it had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.*

⁷ *With this it touched my mouth and said: 'Look, this has touched your lips, your guilt has been removed and your sin forgiven'*

⁸ *I then heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me'.*

2. Psalm for meditation: Psalm 39

¹ I waited, I waited for Yahweh, then he stooped to me and heard my cry for help.

² He pulled me up from the seething chasm, from the mud of the mire. He set my feet on rock, and made my footsteps firm.

³ He put a fresh song in my mouth, praise of our God. Many will be awestruck at the sight, and will put their trust in Yahweh.

⁴ How blessed are those who put their trust in Yahweh, who have not sided with rebels and those who have gone astray in falsehood.

⁵ How much you have done, Yahweh, my God -- your wonders, your plans for us -- you have no equal. I will proclaim and speak of them; they are beyond number.

⁶ You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering, but you gave me an open ear, you did not ask for burnt offering or sacrifice for sin;

⁷ then I said, 'Here I am, I am coming.' In the scroll of the book it is written of me, Take the Bible Quiz now!

⁸ my delight is to do your will; your law, my God, is deep in my heart.

⁹ I proclaimed the saving justice of Yahweh in the great assembly. See, I will not hold my tongue, as you well know.

¹⁰ I have not kept your saving justice locked in the depths of my heart, but have spoken of your constancy and saving help. I have made no secret of your faithful and steadfast love, in the great assembly.

¹¹ You, Yahweh, have not withheld your tenderness from me; your faithful and steadfast love will always guard me.

2. The originality of the Betharramite mission

Rule of Life 15 ; God is the Saviour through His Son Jesus Christ and by the gift of his Spirit. "In the depths of our hearts where he fosters a ceaseless fermentation"²⁰, God seeks to reveal His name and His face. Our mission is to reveal this face of God by the witness of our lives and the proclamation of the Word.

"The aim of our Society is not so much to preach, hear confessions or teach, etc., as to form men well disposed to perform these ministries worthily when the bishop or leader of the Society asks them. The object of the Society is then to train and form these ministers so perfectly that at the first signal of the will of their bishop or superior they can be worthily chosen to work for the salvation of souls."

Two other ways to live as a Betharramite community:

It is difficult to understand why it is so difficult to harmonize community and mission as it results from the renewal of the Congregation since Vatican II. Before the Council, the emphasis was on living together under the same roof, by punctually attending the community activities: prayer, meals, ministries required by the work... The main criterion was the amount of time spent together. Today, the community commitment is more expressed by the sharing of life, of faith, of the goods and the mission. It is rather a matter of quality time spent together. For this, we have an example in the history of the Congregation.

1. At St. Michael's time and in the following years, not all communities were equal. The community of teachers and that of missionaries were two different things. During the summer a retreat was held for the teachers and another one for the missionaries. Let us figure out what the community life of the missionaries was like, as P. Mieyàa describes it:

could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many recognised them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

Lk 10, 17-20

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said, 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, I have given you power to tread down serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'

For community sharing

- > First: the Gospel of the 72 who go out for the mission and come back (Lk 10,17) and wish to share with Jesus. What joy related to the mission can we share today, when we come back from the "peripheries"?
- > Moment of prayer in order to thank God for our ministry and to ask his blessing...

3. The conversion of Saint Michael (in *L'Écho de Bétharram*, 1935)

«Dear sisters, it is the "good Sister" who converted me. When I was young, I looked upon myself as an upstart dandy. While I had tended my mother's sheep, I had suffered poverty; I tended to wear smart shoes, to replace the shepherd's clogs. Once two young girls came to my confessional and told me about the desire of becoming religious sisters. Since I was far from appreciating the style of poverty and mortification of the Daughters of the Cross, I said to my penitents: "Above all do not go to the Daughters of the Cross... Go rather to the religious of Nay". Dear sisters, thank God, the two girls were more cautious than me, who was their confessor, and entered your congregation. This is the point I had reached when I had an opportunity of meeting the "good Sister" (this is how Saint Michael used to refer to the foundress); On seeing the holiness of this chosen soul, the style of her religious life, her poverty, I began to reflect within myself and came to realise that I was on the wrong route. Oh, dear sisters, where would I be now without her? She is indeed the one who converted me: I owe her, after God, everything worthwhile that I have done; yes, I say it, it is her who converted me».

For the community meeting:

The meeting starts by reading Nrs. 7-8 of *Evangelii Gaudium*

7. Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy". I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict

XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".

8. Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

Questions for community sharing

- What do these two paragraphs of E.G. inspire you?
- Tell us about some concrete experience of your vocation (a significant and crucial event/experience).
- The General Chapter of 2011 asked the communities to be open and welcoming:
 - * Was this mandate fulfilled in your community?
 - * Which difficulties did your community have to face?
 - * What do you suggest to make this opening a reality.
- Tell about a vocational experience you had with some young person.

FOR US, COMMUNITY AND MISSION GO TOGETHER

The goal of fraternal life in community is to create unity of hearts among persons who are different in so many aspects of life. Unity is reached by gathering around the faith in Jesus Christ, the consecration, the spirituality, the mission. It is a matter of fostering what unites us: one God and Father of all, One Lord, One faith, one Baptism (Eph 4.1 to 7), a Word, a Eucharist, a Charism, St Michael Garicoits, a legacy, a glorious story and an even more glorious future to be built.

The difference is not an obstacle, but a challenge that leads us to accept in a spirit of poverty that the other has something that I don't have; and to give generously away what I possess and that my brother may not possess. This makes the community the ideal place to practice the commandment of love towards those whom we treat as brothers, as sons of the same Father.

This is the experience of ecclesial communion, the great value that the Church is called to bring to today's world. The Church is a mystery of missionary communion. The church, home and school of communion, used to say St. John Paul II. The religious communities, having a reduced number of members, are particularly suited to be privileged places where one lives and bears witness to the spirituality of communion

1. Jesus and his disciples are missionaries in community

Mk 6, 30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat. So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they