

# THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF MICHAEL GARICOÏTS

by Father Beñat Oyhénart scj



DO WE REALLY KNOW THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF ST. MICHAEL WHO SHARED HIS DREAM AND HIS EFFORTS TO FULFIL IT IN THE CHURCH OF HIS TIME? PROBABLY WE DO: WHO HAS NEVER HEARD OF FR. GUIMON, FR. CHIROU, FR. LARROUY, FR. PERGUILHEM, FR. FONDEVILLE, FR. D. BARBÉ, FR. SARDOY? BUT WE MAY NOT KNOW THEIR PERSONALITY, NOR HOW THEY

MET SAINT MICHAEL, HOW THEY DECIDED TO FULLY DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO A PROJECT WHICH WAS INSPIRED BY GOD AND DREW THEM TO BE THE PILLARS OF THE EMERGING CONGREGATION, DESPITE ALL THE WORKS AND THE OBSTACLES, THE DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES. THERE ARE SOME BEAUTIFUL STORIES TO TELL.

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## Simon Guimon, a fiery temper

Bishop d'Arbou, appointed to Bayonne in 1830, wanted to continue the project of Bishop d'Astros: bring all the seminarians back to Bayonne. The old superior of Betharram, Pierre-Procope Lassalle, died on July 5, 1831. He was succeeded by Michael Garicoïts. Appointed to the Convent of Igon, was Simon Guimon, a former missionary. He didn't last long: the rigor of the new chaplain discouraged young religious and postulants. Jeanne-Élisabeth Bichier des Ages, the founder, was upset by it and so Michael Garicoïts took the road to Igon; For 30 years!

Far from being discouraged, Simon Guimon put himself under the guidance of the new superior of Betharram. Thus, his first support is formed, more than a friend. As planned, the seminary of Betharram was empty after the ordinations of December 23, 1833. Eventually, Abbé Guimon took up a hectic schedule of parish ministry. Michel Garicoïts however didn't travel further than the convent of Igon: four kilometres! But what a spiritual journey!

In contact with the nuns, Michel Garicoïts felt called to create a congregation; A retreat with Fr. Leblanc, a Jesuit, confirmed it: "You will be the father of a family that will be our sister". At the end of 1832, after an animated discussion, he convinced Simon Guimon to become the first Companion, the ardent defender of the foundation. Bishop d'Arbou was less enthusiastic: while he approved the formation of a Society at Betharram; He was slow to accept that priests (from his diocese) would enter.

Michel Garicoïts thought that Simon Guimon was at one with him. Yet one day he discovered a letter: four pages of insults. The paper was signed: Guimon! An explanation was quickly forthcoming. On reading the

letter, the presumed author looked troubled; He reread and exclaimed: "It is my writing, my signature. But It was not I who wrote it; It is the devil! He hugged Michael's neck, and they stay embraced for a long time, with moist eyes ...

In 1841, Mgr. Lacroix Bishop of Bayonne for three years, arrived at Betharram with a Rule for Auxiliary Priests. With fervour, Simon Guimon demanded religious vows; And when he thought he had lost the battle, he fell at the feet of the Bishop, vowing to rise only when he was heard. The silence was long, very long. The Bishop gave in and granted to the small group the vows and the Rule chosen by Michael Garicoits. Father Guimon had a fiery personality, sometimes given to odd behaviour. He was sometimes criticised for this, but each time he accepted correction and asked forgiveness, often on his knees.

Beñat Oyhenart SCJ

Correspondence of Saint Michael, published and introduced by Fr. Miéyaa scj In 1855, when cholera spread through the countryside, St Michael sent almost all his missionaries to the parishes to help the parish priests to help the sick. The epidemic was widespread, and much worse, the misery so great that many died for lack of care. Fr. Guimon had been given some money from some Basque priests, and apparently also from Bishop Lacroix. Because of his vow of poverty, he did not dare to dispose of it without proper authorisation. He asked his superior. St Michael Garicoits answered him by this brief letter (Nr. 113 bis).

.....

My dear friend, why are you asking me? When you sacrifice yourself for souls, give, give all that you have. Assist all these unfortunates; Do whatever you can to relieve them.

.....

\*

*We shall meet Father Guimon and his missionary zeal sometime later, at the time of the great departure for America. Meanwhile, in 1833, a third companion joined the first two members of the small congregation: Father Jean Chirou.*

(NEF Nr. 122 - January 14<sup>th</sup> 2017)

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## Jean Chirou, the first companion

**WITH MICHAEL GARICOÏTS AND SIMON GUIMON, THE SOCIETY OF BETHARRAM WAS JUST AN ABSTRACT IDEA. WITH THE ARRIVAL OF FR CHIROU, THE PROJECT STARTS TAKING THE SHAPE OF A TRIO, THE BEGINNING OF A REAL COMMUNITY.**

Lots of questions about Fr Jean Chirou. Firstly, why call him the "first companion" when Simon Guimon was already with Michael Garicoits? He was the first to come to rejoin his former schoolmaster; at that time, Guimon was absent, busy, as so often, going from mission to mission.

Who was Jean Chirou? He was the first to arrive in the new society in 1834. He was also the first to succeed the founder, in 1863. And between those two dates? The Betharram historians are not very talkative. Born in 1808 in Pontacq – 13 kms from Lourdes – he was at the Betharram Seminary when he felt uncertain about his vocation; he was tempted to live out another life somewhere else. So, he looked for a good advisor – why not this Garicoits that his friends feared so much? He weighed things up, made



a decision, and wasn't disappointed. "You do well not to blindly want to do what others do... have the courage to show yourself to be a good and fervent seminarian. Leave your friends who are full of the spirit of the time; give your whole self to the Lord. He wants you to be a saint and a very holy priest." The seminarian would never forget it. From 1830, the future founder confided his plans in him. He was ready to follow him. He was just sub-deacon and Michael Garicoïts had not yet met Fr Leblanc in Toulouse. Now a priest, on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1831, Jean Chirou became a curate in Morlaas. On 27<sup>th</sup> May 1833, he asked to rejoin the Betharram Society, which Monsignor D'Arbou himself desired. The bishop agreed, but appointed him to Louvigny. A little patience! In mid-August 1834, he was sent urgently to Urt at the other end of the diocese. And there, a miracle! On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September 1834, just before Mass, he received a letter: he could go to Betharram. The homily was short, vespers followed straightaway ... and then he got on his mare. 120 kms further, at nightfall, came the reunions!

Michael Garicoïts wasn't expecting him. Guimon even less so. God knows where he preached! But the former schoolmaster and the refound disciple had so much to talk about. And what a lot of emotion! What was there to eat? Nothing except a bit of bread and the last of the bacon, quickly roasted by the chimney fire. "Never have I eaten with more happiness, or with such a good appetite" said Fr Chirou. It was easy to believe him! In October 1835, the "Betharram staff" gave themselves an order and elected Michael Garicoïts as Superior; each promised obedience and poverty, and renewed the vow of chastity. Chirou was one of the six names quoted by Fr Fondeville in the Congregation's 'birth certificate'. On the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1841, the first commitments were made, according to the constitution of Monsignor Lacroix: if Fr Guimon managed to obtain the faculty of committing oneself through vows, the bishop minimised the impact of this and insisted on appointing the Superior. What about Fr Chirou's missions? "A pleasant orator, full of gentleness", he was a missionary. However, we only know of two missions he undertook, in 1838 and in 1856. A true missionary, he didn't understand opening up schools. He moved away from the founder's demands and leaned towards the Bishop's opinions which were less restrictive. Was it to push him away that Michael Garicoïts appointed him to Oloron and then to Sarrance? However, Fr Chirou guaranteed he loved Fr Garicoïts more than anyone. When, on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1863, the founder died, Monsignor Lacroix was there for the funeral, and to put his ideas in place and to only authorise voluntary vows. He appointed Jean Chirou as superior – out of that very first team, he was closest to the Bishop. The promised new constitution was slow to come; the community suffered from this lack of clarity.

However, in 1868, Monsignor Lacroix proposed a vote at the assembly of priests: 23 voted – 16 for obligatory vows and 7 for voluntary vows. Two thirds were loyal to the original ideal.

And as for Fr Chirou during this time? A good administrator, he continued the legacy of the founder. If Fr Larrouy, another companion from the start, had dared to write to him: "the spirit of the foundation has been extinguished and the thoughts of the founder destroyed", he would have recognised this himself. "Poor Fr Garicoïts, how he has suffered from our opposition! ... I see it clearly now; he had good reason to stand against us 100 times."

The epitaph on his grave reminds us that we owe the restoration of Betharram's Calvary to Fr Chirou. Between 1867 and 1873, with Fr Basilide Bourdenne as architect, he fulfilled Garicoïts's desire, thanks to donations from pilgrims, to sacrifices made by the community and the contribution of the "colony of America". The benediction was planned for 14<sup>th</sup> September 1873. It was to happen without him. A sudden illness took him from us on 29<sup>th</sup> August. Fr Auguste Etchécopar succeeded him and permanently established the Congregation.

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(NEF Nr 123 - February 14<sup>th</sup> 2017)

## Real missionaries!

### Jean-Louis Larrouy

On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1834, Jean Chirou arrived in Betharram. Who would follow him? The response is in a letter from Monsignor d'Arbou to Michael Garicoïts dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December: "I am going to appoint Mr Larrouy". Jean-Louis Larrouy was 32 years old; he had been a priest for 2 years; first of all a curate, then a parish priest in a little village in the Aspe Valley. He left his presbytery on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1834 and arrived in Betharram in January. Starting as a missionary, he became a superior in Sarrance in 1850. He was a volunteer in America and left with the first team in 1856. A deep man, he was the spiritual director of the group. In 1862, he was the chaplain and the superior of San Juan in Buenos Aires. As a missionary, he didn't understand that he should open schools; he therefore opposed Fr Barbé and the San Jose High School, even writing to Fr Garicoïts. However, he stayed faithful to the original ideal: he was the spokesman and reproached Fr Chirou: "The spirit of the foundation is extinguished and the ideas of the founder crushed."



*The names of Fr. Larrouy and Br. Fabien are engraved on the monument dedicated in Buenos Aires to the victims of the yellow fever in 1871.*

In 1857, an outbreak of cholera claimed more than 10,000 victims in Montevideo: Mr Larrouy went to volunteer there and the population wanted him to be apostolic curate of Uruguay; being humble, he returned to Argentina. In 1871, yellow fever decimated the city of Buenos Aires; together with his colleagues, he provided help to the sick and became ill himself. On 6<sup>th</sup> April, Mr Larrouy, Mr Irigaray and Brother Fabian died.

### Pierre Perguilhem

After Larrouy, Fathers Fondeville and Perguilhem were admitted to Betharram on 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July 1835. Who were they? Let's start with Fr Perguilhem who was also a "true missionary". Born in 1798 – one year later than Michael Garicoïts – very near Orthez, he did all his ecclesiastic studies in Toulouse, where François Lacroix (the future bishop of Bayonne) taught. Monsignor d'Astos ordained him priest on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1821. "Cultivated, pious, eloquent" (Miéyaa), he joined the Hasparren Society of Missionaries as from January 1822. When the





revolution of 1830 forbade this ministry, he became “priest with no pastoral task” in Pau: despair for this passionate soul! Fortunately, in 1831, Michael Garicoïts asked him to lead the ordination retreat at Betharram: there he met Fr Guimon, and the one who aspired to set up a congregation. In 1832, as parish priest of Labastide-Clairence, he found the limits of his parish of 2,000 faithful to be narrow. As soon as he could, he left to preach elsewhere, as far as the neighbouring diocese: His bishop reproached him for it! Monsignor d’Arbou accepted his request for Betharram, but urged him to wait! In his heart, however, Fr Perguilhem had already left. The dream became reality on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1835. At last! Fr Perguilhem was endowed with some good physical and intellectual qualities: “handsome, good-looking, magnificent height”; cultivated, great speaker ... he organised Betharram’s grand receptions and surpassed himself by welcoming Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie. In the country, the women loved to listen to him; but were not attracted to his confessional. They could recognise that: “he was a pleasant, fine man, but quite a scary man!”. Pitiless when it came to sin, he scared people with hell and death; and before absolving them, he was very lengthy, perhaps even neverending, and above all strict. He stayed with the habits of his early days; Michael Garicoïts did not manage to make him more gentle. When Fr Guimon set off for America, he advised this man that he had known at Hasparren: “Be merciful to souls!”. And Fr Perguilhem himself recommended to other colleagues: “Be good, all you others; I myself cannot be...” His only consolation, his only comfort, was his devotion to Mary.

This man who was general councillor several times, founder and superior at Orthez from 1849 to 1861, died in Betharram on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1872. Surely, in his goodness, God welcomed him.

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(NEF Nr 124 - MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup> 2017)

## Siméon Fondeville, le confesseur du P. Garicoïts

A lively history of the life of Father Fondeville? Not really. But certainly some contrasting appreciations.

On May 13, 1835, Abbé Ségalas, director of the Seminary of Bayonne, wrote to Michael Garicoïts: “I have been told that this cowardly pastor [Fondeville] has asked permission to abandon his flock; And, if this is true, I think he should go and do penance with you.”

At the death of Father Fondeville, Mgr. Lacroix asked: “I desire that we always have at Betharram the true picture of this man of God; The reproduction of his features is destined to edify and inspire virtue.”

Pierre-Siméon Fondeville was born in Bruges, 10 km from Bétharram. His mother consecrated him to Mary. From the age of five, he was an annual pilgrim of Notre-Dame. At ten years old a disease paralysed his father. As a seminarist in Saint-Pé, then at Bétharram, his family opposed his vocation.

Ordained on June 13, 1829, he became a missionary of Hasparren. But with uncertain health, he contented himself with a ministry in a parish, at Labatmale on January 1, 1830. He moved to Asson on January 15, 1832 where he displayed great energy. But again, poor health overtook him, so at the end of a year he asked to be replaced; But the bishop had no replacement.

The Spa cures and various treatments and times of recuperation made little difference: so Abbé Fondeville found a haven in Betharram. He took refuge there in the winter of 1834-35. Bp. d'Arbou confided to Father Garicoits: "Fr. Fondeville's state worries me, and I think that if I entrust him with a post, his days will be numbered; But on the other hand, it will not be possible to replace him at Asson before Lent begin. And the bishop put forward a plan: while the invalid convalesced, Father Chirou or Father Larrouy would be able to minister at Asson from Betharram. Father Garicoits accepted; Even better: he proposed to make Fondeville part of his team.

On June 23, 1835, Father Fondeville asked to return to Betharram and arrived there on 13 July 1835. Father Garicoits chose him as his confessor.

As bursar of the community, he was also "infirmarian", looking after his colleagues and watching over his superior. Above all, he was, right to the end, a chaplain, a "workman of Our Lady," he said. Every morning, at five o'clock, he was in the confessional, leaving it only to give communion to some pilgrim. Often he went to the sacristy, where with great kindness, he listened to every kind of trouble. There he taught deaf-mutes, mentally handicapped and blind people, sent to him by parish priests or even families. To all he gave his counsel; To the most needy, he gave alms from his personal allowance. In 30 years he educated more than 1,500 disabled people. His recreation? Visiting the sick!

On September 24, 1863, after the death of the founder, he was a General Councillor. But in the confessional this "humble worker of Our Lady of Betharram" was struck with an attack of paralysis; To his colleagues, he said: "The time has come to return home. He died on December 22, 1872.



## The Beginnings...

**From Michael Garicoïts :** *"Nothing great has great beginnings. Providence does not proceed by magnificent advances and superb proclamations; it doesn't begin with show. But it starts with a small cradle, a narrow path leading nowhere, little things, which appear to lead nowhere. Then, all this works and continues, slowly, silently, for 30 years in Nazareth. And then this mustard seed became a big tree."*

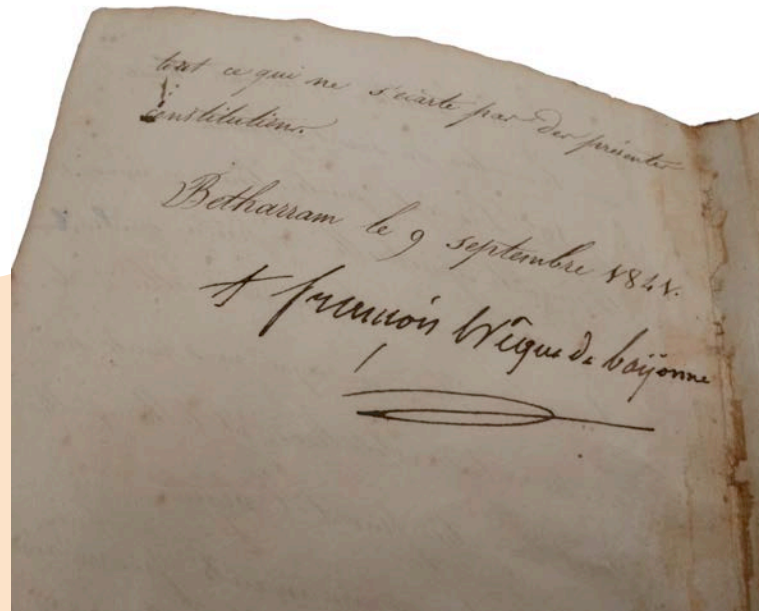
**From Fr. Fondeville,** the story of the beginnings: *"In the month of October, 1835, the personnel of Betharram, composed of M. Garicoits, Guimon, Perguilhem, Chirou, Larrouy, and Fondeville, wished to have a Rule to edify and sanctify themselves.*

*The Rules of the House of the Missionaries of Hasparren were adopted, and without any preparatory novitiate other than their good will to glorify God, save their souls and sanctify the people, the members unanimously elected Fr. Garicoits as their superior, and promised obedience, poverty, renewed their vow of chastity and emptied their small purses into his hands."*



This is probably the beginning of the Community; Without being able to specify the exact date. These lines come from a Chronicle of Betharram, written shortly before his death. However, a little later, the same author dates the foundation at 1841. Now the preface of the Constitutions of 1838 is "the Founding Text", given by Michael Garicoits. What date is the right one? All of them!

- **In 1835**, the first community gathered; His programme of life comes from Hasparren.
- **In 1838**, the Rule is still taken elsewhere; But this time Michel Garicoits writes the preface.
- **In 1841**, Bishop Lacroix brought Betharram its own first constitutions.



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## Heading to America

IT IS QUITE DIFFICULT TO SUM UP THE LIFE OF A PERSON IN A COUPLE OF PAGES! IN THE CASE OF FATHER SIMON GUIMON, IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE. WE CAME TO KNOW HIM BETTER LAST JANUARY, DURING THE FIRST CHAPTER OF HIS LIFE THAT TOOK PLACE IN FRANCE. LET US GO BACK TO HIM NOW AT A TIME WHEN THE SMALL SOCIETY OF BETHARRAM IS AT A TURNING POINT: THE DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA. WHO KNOWS WHETHER, DURING HIS LONG JOURNEY ON THE ETINCELLE, GAZING AT THE HORIZON, HIS ARDENT IMAGINATION MADE HIM CONCEIVE OF A FUTURE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS OF BETHARRAM, BRINGING TOGETHER ON THE NEW CONTINENT, BETHARRAMITES OF ELEVEN DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES (AMONG THEM FOUR BASQUES ONLY)?

In 1841, Bishop of Bayonne for three years, Bishop Lacroix arrived at Betharram with a Rule for auxiliary priests.

With fervour Simon Guimon asked for religious vows; And thinking he had lost the battle, fell at the feet of the Bishop, swearing not to rise again till he should be heard. The silence was long, very long. The Bishop gave in and granted to the small group the vows and the rules chosen by Michel Garicoits. Father Guimon had a fiery spirit, which drove him to eccentricities. He was blamed for some things, but each time he accepted and asked for forgiveness, often on his knees. He wasn't slow to answer back either. When Bishop Lacroix taunted him: "Father Guimon, Isaiah would have made an excellent missionary!" he fired back: "And an excellent bishop too!" "This devil of a Basque does not speak French; But he is eloquent!" Says Abbe Combalot, a Parisian preacher. Above all, he is full of mercy. The founder of the abbey of Belloc testifies: "A young squire had not confessed for a long time. He approached Father Guimon and the latter embraced him. Then, the confession finished, the nobleman said: "In my turn, I embrace you: you made me happy!" "Was Europe too small for this valiant missionary? He was one of those who witnessed so many Basques and Bearnais going to South America, and wondered what becomes of their faith? Why not priests to accompany them? The ebullient Father Guimon first contacted Monsignor Lacroix and other priests before addressing his own Superior! Michael Garicoits convoked a "general congregation" (September 16, 1854). Before the vote, he made an "important observation": "Father Guimon did not behave according to the rules of religious obedience. Before he worked as he did, to procure personnel for America and to have this mission accepted by the Bishop, he should have spoken to the Superior of the community, to consult with him and to act under his direction. Despite this, the mission for the Diocese of Buenos Aires was accepted by 20 votes out of 21 (the other vote lost).

The preparations were long! The pioneer team was designated: Guimon was chosen of course; Didace Barbé, the teacher, was group leader; Larrouy was one of them; Harbustan and Sardoy, both from Barcus, entered Betharram for that purpose; The scholastic Jean Magendie accompanied them, as well as the brothers Fabien (from Pau) and Joannès (also from Barcus).



# Diocèse de Bayonne

Société des Prêtres du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus.

Nous soussigné Supérieur Général de la Société des Prêtres du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus, établie à Betharram, faisons savoir à qui il appartiendra que M. Diéace Barbé, Prêtre de ladite société a été nommé supérieur de ceux des nôtres envoyés par Mgr. l'Evêque de Bayonne dans le Diocèse de Buenos Ayres (Amérique méridionale) pour y travailler, suivant la fin de notre Société, soit auprès de leurs compatriotes Basques et Béarnais, soit auprès des indigènes, sous la direction et obédience de Monseigneur l'Evêque dudit Diocèse et du Supérieur de la Société.

En foi de quoi, nous lui avons délivré les présentes. Bayonne, le 30 août 1856.

Vic. approuvé et autorisé  
Bayonne le 31 août 1856  
Mouton, Vic. gén.

Garicoits, Sup.

## Mission statement

This document of the founder is a gem! Today it would be called "a Mission Statement". And it should be read very closely, even under a microscope!

From the very first line, Michel Garicoits styles himself as "Superior General": he wanted a religious Congregation: he made known the appointment of Father Barbé; Even if "our people" are "sent by the Bishop of Bayonne", in his letter to the Bishop of Buenos Aires, he (the bishop of Bayonne) is not the one presenting them as members of a Society.

Often it is said that Father Guimon and the others are sent to the Basque émigrés. A simple reading makes it possible to see that the "Béarnais" are mentioned there too!

...and we don't stop with "the Basques and Béarnais compatriots". Michel Garicoits does not forget the "natives": they are not émigrés...

Michel Garicoits has a clear interest in what we call today "mission ad gentes".

The group is "under the direction and obedience of Monsignor the Bishop of the said Diocese [of Buenos Aires] and the Superior of the Society": this is wholly "following the aims of our Society"!

Was the letter, dated August 30th, written at Betharram? "Betharram" was scratched and replaced by "Bayonne": the original word remains legible under the correction! Why?

On 31st August the Superior is at Bayonne at the moment of departure. There, M. Boutoey, Vicar General, attests that it is indeed the diocese that sends these missionaries: he countersigns the letter of the Superior General ...

They embarked on 31 August 1856, and they arrived at their destination on 4 November.

The letter of obedience stipulated that they were "sent by the Bishop of Bayonne to the Diocese of Buenos Aires, to work there, following the aims of the Society, either with their Basque and Bearnese compatriots, or under the direction and obedience of the Bishop of the diocese and the Superior of the Society." But a hundred miles radius around the capital, was too small for men of the temper of Father Guimon... Beyond the lines defended by the military, lived indigenous Indians. Fathers Guimon, Larrouy

and Harbustan met with dignitaries of the Pampas tribes. The third meeting would be the last one: hostile body language was in evidence, with threatening spears... Father Harbustan wrote cryptically: "Unfortunately among us, not even in the venerable Fr. Guimon, was the thirst for martyrdom ardent enough to come to such an act of heroism". These missionaries, so generous, wanted to go further: to be "Apostolic Missionaries" (independent of the Bishops) and to settle in Montevideo. Michel Garicoïts wrote his disagreement with the Superior of America: "The idea of the title of Apostolic Missionary was fought by me in the most energetic way when you left Betharram. "What use do you think that would be?" I said to Fr. Guimon. "It would only serve to antagonise the bishops everywhere" (...)

"I have already said that the request for a mission to the Indians seems to me quite inappropriate at present." I cannot at present give you orders concerning Montevideo; we shall see later, when the position and designs of God become more clearly manifested. I would wish with all my heart to help our compatriots in Montevideo: but the moment has not come." Michael Garicoïts knew how to be patient! After several missions in Uruguay, the Vicar Apostolic of this country invited the priests of the Sacred Heart to settle there. Michael Garicoïts agreed.

But Father Guimon would not be a part of this journey. In Lent 1861 he was still preaching. On the 7th of April, one week after Easter, it was the last battle; Disease finally overtook him on May 22, 1861. Learning of his death, Michel Garicoïts ordered the remains of his first companion of our foundation, his friend, to be brought back to Betharram. They have been in the Calvary cemetery since May 29, 1872.

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(NEF NR. 126 - 14 MAY 2017)

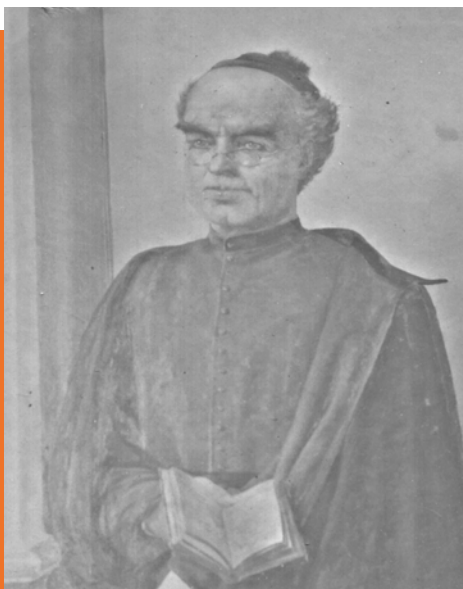
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## Didace Barbé, a born educator

How difficult the beginning of the 19th Century was in France after the Revolution! In every way... Didace Barbé – Didace Casenave-Barbé, to use his full name – was born in Beuste, in Béarn on the 15th July 1813. His father, Pierre, was a carpenter; his mother, Catherine, a housewife and labourer, was employed on a daily basis to suit the needs of the neighbours... The child was baptised on the day of his birth. Without doubt, the parents had a strong faith. However, they only married on 31st December 1818, after they already had four children; Didace, the third of the siblings, was almost six years old. And his father died in 1819... The elementary education of Didace was given to him by his godfather, Didace Arague, a primary school teacher. From the age of 9 years, the child became a teacher himself! That is to say, his uncle and godfather was keen to give a little sum of money so that he could help his mother to bring up his brother and sisters. At the same time, a retired priest at the presbytery taught him Latin.

At the age of 16, there he was at the little seminary of St Pé, which also trained a friend of Michael Garicoïts, Bertrand-Sévère Laurence (who would be the Bishop at the time of the Lourdes apparitions). During the first year, his family provided his food; a collection amongst the people of Beuste payed for his studies. Then an uncle paid in 220 francs a year, and Father Fourcade let him off with the rest. In three years, Didace finished his secondary studies ; he already taught the younger boys.

The superior wanted him to be a teacher-seminarian. He followed the Theology course, which Michael Garicoïts came to teach from Bétharram ; and the latter became his spiritual adviser! Naturally, Didace wanted to go to Bétharram; the favour was granted to him by Monsignor Lacroix after the presbyterial



ordination on the 22nd September 1838. And, on the 22nd October 1842, he made his religious vows.

Straightaway, Michael Garicoïts earmarked Didace Barbé, a born educator, for teaching. Bétharram School, established in 1837, was in need of a Headmaster. Vincent Éliçabide, a lay-person, had left after two years: his financial demands exceeded Michael Garicoïts' possibilities. He would be guillotined in 1840 after a triple murder. For a year, Jean Lacazette was the second Headmaster of Bétharram School ; considered weak, he was unable to make decisions... Fortunately, Didace Barbé arrived! Michael Garicoïts sent him to be trained at Dax: he obtained the diplomas that the law demanded. In the Autumn of 1840, all licences obtained, the school could even be opened up to boarders.

With the momentum of Father Didace Barbé, supported by his superior, Our Lady's School grew: in 1840, upper primary classes began; in 1847, secondary

education began; 1855 saw the school's first students to take the Baccalaureat: three candidates, all three successful! The new Congregation threw itself into education: Orthez, Mauléon, Asson, Oloron ; and soon also Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

To affirm that Father Didace Barbé was a support for Father Garicoïts, is an understatement! In 1846, he was elected Counsellor; in 1851, he was made assistant to the superior, indeed chosen by him. Father Miéyaa was able to confirm this: the founder "dreamt of having him as his successor; and even while still living, would be prepared to stand aside for him." In 1855, Father Auguste Etchécopar became the confident of Father Garicoïts when the Society of High Studies in Oloron was dissolved. But, already, on the 16th October 1854, the General Assembly of Priests of Bétharram had accepted to go to South America. Father Didace Barbé was appointed to head the team. Without a doubt, Michael Garicoïts would have liked to go: he was ready to when Father Barbé's sister, a Daughter of the Cross, was saddened to see her brother go away... there were 8 companions embarking at Bayonne on 31st August 1856. They arrived in Buenos Aires on 4th November.

Not knowing the country or its language did not stop Father Barbé from speaking to the children: he became their catechist! On 19th March 1858, the feast of St Joseph whom he cherished in particular, he turned an old leather warehouse into an educational establishment: San José High School was born. A year later, to the day, he set up in a completely new venue. If they lacked textbooks, he created them with the help of his colleagues. Whenever diplomas were demanded, he and his colleagues were successful in their exams. As superior of the little community, he never prevented the missionary efforts of Fathers Guimon, Harbustan and others. On the contrary ! Already by the end of 1856, he had created a spiritual centre in Buenos Aires, in the church of San Juan. In 1861, another was created in Uruguay in Montevideo in the Church of the Basques, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. Here too, a high school was opened on 1st October 1867. His activity was limitless ; his dedication too. One would see him in chapel, in the dormitory, in the refectory, in class : everywhere ! Headmaster of the school and leader of the Community. Working and praying. A man of guidance for the younger and the older ones. But his ascetic life took its toll on his health. He had to go to class on crutches. One day, while dictating a lesson, he collapsed ; taken away unconscious to his room, he died there on 13th August 1869. Michael Garicoïts had already died six years beforehand.

Perhaps we do not pay enough attention to what binds the founder to this much loved disciple ? An abundant correspondence existed between them, it seems; only fragments have been conserved. According to Father Magendie, Father Barbé destroyed these letters which were too full of praise towards him.

Beñat Oyhenart SCJ  
(NEF Nr. 127 - JUNE 14<sup>TH</sup> 2017)

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## Pierre Sardoy: the journey of a missionary

Pierre Sardoy is a true missionary; at least according to Father Simon Guimon's criteria ...

Would his first quality be as Barkostar, having originated from Barcus? He was born on 21 September 1810 in the same village as Father Guimon.

When at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, Father Guimon hears the sad spiritual fate of the Basques who emigrated to Argentina or Uruguay, he has only one desire: go and bring them the Good News. His tactic is simple: find out who could work in America and have this mission accepted by the bishop, before even talking to the superior. We know how the founder appreciated this way of going about things, so little in conformity with the rules of obedience (see NEF n° 126, May 2017). And now this mission is accepted!

Having been a priest since 20 May 1837, and parish priest of Menditte (in Soule) since 1842, Pierre Sardoy is among the first priests contacted; informally, of course! In 1854, Father Guimon said to him point-blank: "Will you come with me to America? Our Basques live there like pagans..." There was a quick answer: "Why not?" They speak for a moment. Father Guimon is eloquent, Abbé Sardoy volunteers. Just as planned!

When the "General Congregation" of 16 September 1854 accepted the mission in the diocese of Buenos Aires, it was necessary to prepare the departure and also to regroup the volunteers. In early 1856, Bishop Lacroix authorized Abbé Sardoy to leave his parish; he comes to Bétharram in April. At the end of a few weeks of probation, instead of the usual two years, he takes the religious vows in the Society of the Sacred Heart.

He leaves for America! The crossing is difficult: several storms, navigation errors, sickness and even lack of food at the end; Father Sardoy comes out of it with anaemia. Upon arrival, he accompanies Father Guimon through Argentina and Uruguay: they are missionaries!

Here, the missions do not happen as in the diocese of Bayonne: often it is their fellow countrymen, not the priests, who welcome them in their houses. However, both in Buenos Aires and in the Pampas, their zeal attracts others: they preach in Basque, even in Béarnais, sometimes in French, with time to learn Spanish. Above all, they proclaim the gospel and are always ready to take confessions and give the sacraments, without schedules, without appointments. The bishop himself admires them and testifies to this in a letter to Bishop Lacroix.

As early as December 1856, the Poor Clares of Buenos Aires allow the newcomers to lead the worship on Sunday in San Juan Church. In 1862, after agreement between the Abbess of Santa Clara and the Bishop of Buenos Aires, the service of the church and the convent is entrusted to the Missionaries of Bétharram; so the chaplaincy of the converted convent becomes the "House of the Mission", the residence of the community. Father Sardoy was the chaplain to the nuns. To exercise this ministry, new to him, he resorts to the advice of Father Garicoits, who has gained a great deal of experience with the Daughters of the Cross.

Father Sardoy organizes the parish of San Carlos, in Buenos Aires; then he hands it over to the Salesians when they arrive in Argentina. In 1871, he was appointed superior of the residence of San Juan. In 1875, for the first time, he embarked for France. He died on 7 June before being able to rejoin Bétharram in the outskirts of Pauillac, in the estuary of the Gironde.



If, in 1862, Father Sardoy asked Father Garicoits for advice, it was because he held him in great esteem. On 21 June 1860, the superior of Bétharram wrote to him: "My dear father Sardoy"; he adds "my" to the usual "dear"; and "father" comes to replace the ordinary "Mr" of that time.



*San Juan Bautista Church in Buenos Aires, before the restoration of the facade and how Fr Sardoy saw it (above); how it is now (on the opposite page)*



Beñat Oyhenart SCJ  
(NEF NR. 128 - JULY 14<sup>TH</sup> 2017)

## Fabien & Joannès

"BROTHERS ARE NEEDED TO HELP THE PRIESTS OF THE COMMUNITY". FATHER AUGUSTE ETCHÉOPAR REPORTED THESE WORDS OF FATHER MICHEL GARICOÏTS. IT IS THEREFORE NOT SURPRISING TO SEE TWO BROTHERS AMONG THE MISSIONARIES SENT TO SOUTH AMERICA IN 1856."

**Fabien Lhôpital** was one of the very first brothers to enter Bétharram. Born in Pau in 1821, he came to Bétharram in 1846. After first vows in 1849, he became fully committed in 1855. His first role was to be a cook. It had become urgent for a brother to take up this job: domestic workers had robbed the poor community of so much.

From Bétharram Brother Fabien was sent to Orthez; and from there to America, soon serving the San Juan community in Buenos Aires. "A simple life," you might think, but it had its challenges as Father Garicoits writes to Father Barbé, the superior: "Please tell Brother Fabien that I received his letter [where he speaks of the illness and death of Father Simon Guimon (May 22, 1861)] with much kindness; This is the Brother

Fabien I know. (...) May he always be a good brother, and may the good Lord always give him the blessing of being a good brother. He will have a great reward from this. And on 21 August 1862, Michel Garicoïts replied to Brother Fabien: "I have received your letter with great pleasure. I recognize you very well in this, Brother Fabien. Through all the difficulties you mention to me, you have nothing to fear from obeying. In extraordinarily difficult circumstances, you will get along with Fr. Barbé. Abandon yourself to Divine Providence; even if you get sick, you will lack nothing. Fr. Barbé will come to your rescue, as well as to the help of all of us. It is our duty, but also our pleasure, believe it. (...) The important thing is to behave well in serving God and the Sacred Heart community. The best way to do this is to be humble, like a small child, obedient, content and faithful."

In 1871, yellow fever raged; Brother Fabien devoted himself to the sick. Contracting the disease himself, he died on 8 April 1871. His name appears, along with those of Fathers Larrouy and Irigaray, on a column erected in Buenos Aires as a token of gratitude.



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*Two lay persons are represented on the drawing illustrating the departure for America: they are certainly our religious brothers, Fabien and Joannès*

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**Joannès Arostéguy** arrived at Betharram before Brother Fabien and lived a more challenging life.

Why did Joannès Arostéguy give up a job at the cathedral and become a brother at Bétharram? The answer was that he was originally from Barcus, like Simon Guimon who knew how to convince him!

Joannès was born in 1825 into a deeply Christian family. In 1844 his fellow townsman brought him to Michel Garicoïts. He made his first profession in 1846 and his final vows in 1854. He gave this witness of our founder: *"This good father, not content with inspiring our souls with the fire of his word, often joined us to share in our most humble and menial work."*

Intelligent and lively, Brother Joannès was entrusted with all kinds of employment in Bétharram, Pau, Orthez or Asson. At the school of Asson, he was both cook and school teacher: a simple curtain between kitchen and class allowed him to supervise ovens and pupils at the same time...

In 1856 he was among the missionaries of America. With Father Barbé and Brother Magendie, in poverty and deprivation, he was at the establishment of San José college in Buenos-Aires: some rooms served as refectory, classrooms and dormitories and the kitchen was a basic outhouse. On rainy days, water came in from all sides: an umbrella protected the fire and the pot. But famine does not prevent either peace or joy.

In 1862, Brother Joannès joined Harbustan and Irigaray in Montevideo. Here he was sacristan, porter and cook all at once. His conduct was exemplary; his example was more worthy than a homily! He attracted trust: more than once, the bishop took him on his apostolic missions.

In 1892, at 67, he returned to Bétharram, hoping to die there. He devoted himself to the sanctuary where Notre-Dame had welcomed him: he prayed there, worked there, and welcomed pilgrims there.

Next came the laws against religious congregations. In 1903, at the age of 78, Brother Joannès returned to America, after saying farewell to his two sisters, Daughters of the Cross, to all his brothers, to the tombs of Fathers Garicoïts and Guimon, and to Notre-Dame.

He leaves a picturesque account of the journey. Welcomed with happiness in Montevideo, he was happy to return. He became an example of prayer, routine and work, often repeating: "I have only one more trip to take: the one into Eternity". He responded to this final call on 19 May 1910.

This comes from a letter from Father Garicoïts to Brother Joannès in 1857: *"I see with indescribable pleasure that you are content with your position and the people with whom you have to live, especially Fr Barbé. It makes me see that you have certainly stopped listening to your character first... Continue, dear friend, to always watch over this, and to have no other rule of conduct, no further consolation than the pleasure of God"*. Would Brother Joannes have had a strong temperament, causing his frequent changes of community? Surely he has softened with time!

On August 21, 1861, Father Garicoïts addressed Brother Joannès: *"I had received your letter with great pleasure. What has made me especially hopeful of you is the desire to watch your character and to make progress on your strengths. So continue onwards! Be humble, obedient, content and faithful; and God will bless you and your family."*

Beñat Oyhenart SCJ

(NEF NR. 129 - SEPTEMBER 14TH 2017)

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## Jean Magendie: all in the service of the foundation in America

F.V.D.

Bétharram, 3 November 1857

My dear friend,

Yes, yes, with all my heart, I send you the blessing of the old man and the priest; I wish it brings you happiness in life and in death...

We are waiting for your little brother, aspiring to be one of us; his father willingly consents and wants to help him be like you. Pray for us and for him, and always be homo idoneus, expeditus et expositus<sup>1</sup> ; it is the infallible means of being forever the joy and crown of your superiors, the Church and even of God. Amen! Amen!

To all of you in N.-S. J.-C.

Garicoïts, Ptre



It is brief, but how precious to have this letter from Michael Garicoïts to Mr. Magendie, his "dear friend"! The word of the "old man" - as he calls himself - to the youngest of those sent to Buenos Aires: a novice and hardly 22 years old when he is chosen for this mission! But what a religious career! No doubt Michael Garicoïts wanted to ensure the American presence: alongside the first companion, the passionate and fiery Simon Guimon, needing someone quite young who had not completed his training. He thinks first of Brother Pierre Cachica - the one who left a the precious notebook of Father Garicoïts' lessons. But

he was the only son of a widow; we could not impose such a painful separation on his mother. So the choice was for a novice, a volunteer for this mission.

Jean Magendie was born in Beuste (about ten kilometers from Bétharram) on 24 March 1835 (the year when the first community was formed around Father Garicoïts). Between the ages of 16 and 19 he was a student in Bétharram; there his novitiate began on 22 October 1854 (at the time when the mission to America was planned); he made his profession, and on 31 August 1856, embarked with the others: for America!

In his letter of recommendation to the Bishop of Buenos Aires, Mgr. Lacroix, Bishop of Bayonne, spoke of a "young catechist" who accompanied the five priests and the two companion brothers; two years afterwards he asked him to admit him among the clergy, and to confer upon him the various orders. By 20 December 1863 Jean Magendie is a priest (exactly 40 years after Michael Garicoïts).

On 19 March 1858, the young Magendie, still a scholar, was with Fr Barbé and Brother Joannes heroically opening the College of San José in an old leather depot. The missionaries - and even Father Guimon - were in favour of it: they thought they would find vocations there as preachers. But five, six, twenty students in a dirty space was not sufficient: they had to close. The miracle came from the neighborhood: the priest looked to Father Barbé, who never refused to do a service; the police commissioner wanted a good education for the children of the neighbourhood; both became recruiting agents and there were 100 students in late July! Success led to another problem: the need to build, but where? Father Barbé didn't want cheap land but money was lacking! Brother Magendie left his school work and insisted: "We must buy, the money will come!" The answer came: "Be quiet! You are only a child!" Yet the 23-year-old was right: a year later, on 19 March 1859, new premises host the College and Father Garicoïts sends others for teaching!

Father Barbé's first collaborator, Father Magendie was soon to become the trusted counsellor. His righteousness and openness made him a respected and beloved educator. Naturally, on the death of Father Barbé on 13 August 1869, Father Magendie became the director of the college which he was for a long time.

In spite of health weakened by asthma, he put his talents at the service of all his colleagues. At the death of Father Harbustan, they put him at the head: from 1873 to his death he was "Superior of the American Colony", in the words of Father Etchécopar, with whom he maintained a close correspondence. Under his guidance several foundations were started, including those of Rosario, La Plata and Barracas in Argentina, as well as in Asunción in Paraguay. With him, 82 priests and 19 brothers served five colleges, three churches, an apostolate, a novitiate and a community of formation. Several times, his duties brought him back to France: he participated in the general chapters and witnessed the process of beatification of Father Garicoïts, who had been his spiritual advisor.

Faithful to the religious life and the principles inherited from Michael Garicoïts, he also listened to the men and events of his time. He boldly defended the Church against sometimes virulent adversaries; one of them saying: "The man who most troubles me is this monk, and the frail Magendie!"

At the end of a busy life, he died in Buenos Aires on 20 October 1925; he was 90 years old. Is there a biography of this exceptional man? It seems not. Yet he has left documents, some of which differ from those usually used or supplement them...

[Note 1 Explanation from Fr. Etchécopar: "To live a good religious vocation you need to be idoneus, expeditus, expositus. : Idoneus: fit to fulfil the aims of the institution; Expeditus: freed from all ties which would hinder progress; Expositus: exposed to the core before superiors so that they can use him according to his ability.]"



## Jean-Baptiste Harbustan: apostle in Uruguay

Jean-Baptiste Harbustan was born on 5 June 1808 and became diocesan priest on 24 May 1834. He was able to carry out his ministry in his home province, but he was born in Barcus, just like Pierre Sardoy, the priest of the neighboring village ... who was mentored by Father Guimon - him again, and from Barcus as well!

On 16 September 1854, the mission to Buenos Aires was approved. In early 1856, Bishop Lacroix authorized Father Harbustan to go to Bétharram. It all happened very quickly! On 23 April 1856, he joined the Society of the Sacred Heart. For him, as for his friend Sardoy, a few weeks of probation were enough, when it takes two years for others!

The last shall be the first: Fathers Harbustan and Sardoy were the first called to go out to America. Even before Father Guimon, the third Basque! Four men from Béarn followed in the list; and, finally, Brother Joannès, another Basque from Barcus! Why four religious men from this same village? Here, so near Béarn, all men know both languages, Basque and the Béarnese dialect: that was good for missionaries!

Father Jean-Baptiste Harbustan was ready for the mission, even to go as far as the Pampas tribes: he was with Father Guimon when, at the third visit, hostile spears made them retreat (see NEF n ° 126, May 2017) ... He became an apostle in Uruguay!



Montevideo! There, on 3 November 1856, the missionaries of Bétharram arrived in America. A brief stopover, and a good welcome. The next day, on the other bank of the Río de la Plata, in Buenos Aires, no one was present at their arrival ... Whether due to nostalgia or missionary zeal, they asked very quickly to return to Montevideo.

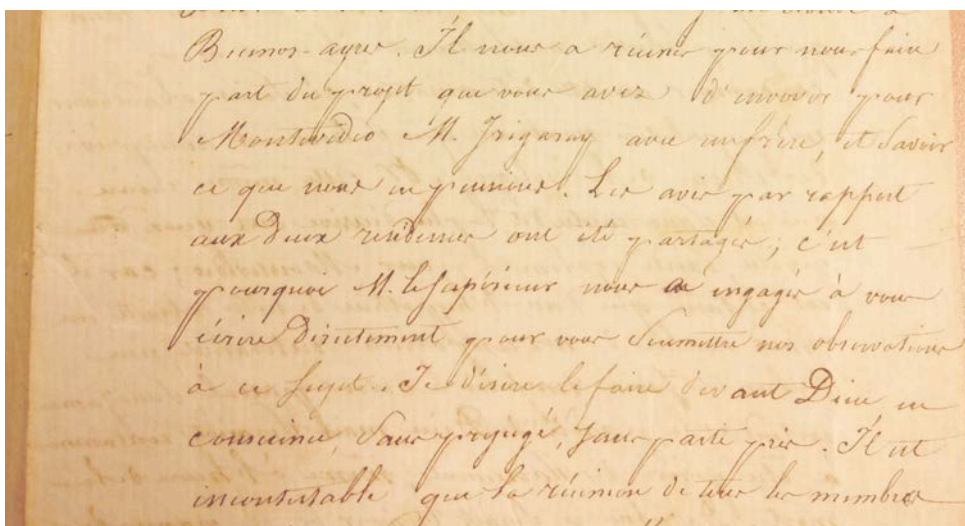
Between the two cities, Dominique Sarrote, a trappist and former missionary of Hasparren, was already around. When he arrived at the Río de la Plata he taught them in their own language, touched by the religious poverty of the Basques. Before

returning to his convent, he met the priests willing to take over: "I left [the province of] Buenos Aires and left it in the care of the Bétharram fathers, and I returned [to Montevideo] to prepare a residence and maybe something more for them. We have started to collect materials for a large church, which we will build in the most beautiful part of the city for the use of our countrymen," he wrote to Canon Etcheberry, cousin of Father Garicoïts.

On 21 June 1859, the founder answered Father Barbé: "I would like with all my heart to go to the aid of our compatriots of Montevideo; but the moment has not yet come: we need good Basque missionaries and a good superior for this residence. It would be a good idea for Mr. Sarrote to address Mgr de Bayonne, or myself, instead of addressing Mgr. de Buenos Ayres". Michael Garicoïts looked for these good Basque missionaries himself!

After missions to Uruguay, the decision was taken to set up a foundation in Montevideo, with, of course, Father Guimon in charge! He remained in Argentina to preach through Lent in 1861; but just after Easter came the illness that took him away on 22 May. Already on 1 March 1861, Father Harbustan had taken over from Father Sarrote in Montevideo, with obvious success among the Basques: Msgr. Jacinto Vera,

Apostolic Vicar of Montevideo, was obliged "to receive, defend and protect the fathers of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who would be appointed by their legitimate superiors to exercise their ministry on the whole territory of [his] jurisdiction" (letter of April 13, 1861). In early 1862, everything became fragile. Father Harbustan fell ill; Father Barbé sent him back to Buenos Aires; Father Garicoïts was considering that Fr Harbustan would return to his native country when he was already presumed to be the superior in Montevideo (letter of 21 March 1862). Yet, in the same letter, the founder announced the long-awaited reinforcement: Father Dominique Irigaray and Brother Maurice. Two residences, yes; but a community or two? "Just two!" Michel Garicoïts followed the advice of Father Harbustan (22 July 1862). Cured, Father Harbustan returned to Montevideo. On 2 October he welcomed Father Dominique and Brother Maurice. Eight days later, Brother Joannès arrived. Nothing however, is simple! Bishop Vera, Apostolic Vicar, did not have the unanimous agreement of his clergy; he changed the parish priest at the cathedral - and then came the unexpected attack; the freemason government took the opportunity to exile the bishop. Welcomed by Father Barbé in Buenos Aires, he remained there from 8 October 1862 to 23 August 1863. "The church of the Basques becomes the refuge of defectors and deserters!" declared the one whom power wanted instead of Bishop Vera. On 10 October 1862, the clergy were summoned to recognize this new Apostolic Vicar, but Father Harbustan reacted with one word, "No!" and slammed the door ...; the following Sunday after mass Father Harbustan saw the police commissioner and two policemen coming to find him; he showed no opposition and walked quickly so



Buenos Aires, 20 May 1862,

Rev Fr Superior [Michael Garicoïts]

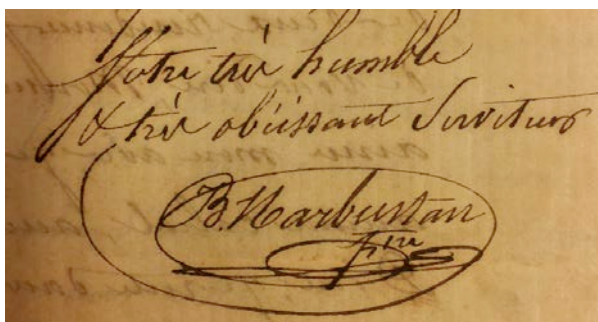
[... Our Superior] has summoned a meeting in order to apprise us of your project to send to Montevideo Fr Irigaray with a brother and to know our opinion. We shared our views about the two residences; that is why the Superior has invited us to write you personally and to submit to you our observations on this subject. I want to do that before God, in all conscience, with no prejudice or preconceived attitude ...

his guards were out of breath. Very suddenly, he went into a house of one of his friends, a parishioner: the French Consul! The police could not follow him there. Between prison and exile, Father Harbustan chose to go to Buenos Aires. Father Garicoïts encouraged him: "So here you are, confessor !!!" (In the sense of confessor of the faith). When the exiled General Flores created a civil war to return to power (19 April 1863), the president in office, Berro, thinking of getting Catholics on

his side, decreed the end of the bishop's exile: in October 1863, the chimes of all the churches celebrated the return of Bishop Vera. In December, more discreetly, Father Harbustan returned to Montevideo; he continued the work undertaken with generosity.

He was the one who completed the so called "Basques" church, planned by Fr. Sarrote, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception according to the wish of the donor of the land in memory of his mother, Conception da Costa. It certainly took time to finish the building: the end date of the work varies

between 1869 and 1871 according to the sources ... But as of 1 October 1867, the College was open and also placed under the protection of the Immaculate Conception.



When, in 1869, Father Barbé, superior of the religious of America, died, Father Harbustan succeeded him, elected by his brothers. In this capacity, he gathered his people in October 1870, on the 19th in Buenos Aires and on the 27th in Montevideo, to vote a petition to the Holy See asking that the Society of the Sacred Heart be approved. He died in Buenos Aires on 13 January 1873. He served his Lord well!

Beñat Oyhenart SCJ  
(NEF NR. 131 - 14 NOVEMBER 2017)

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## That other part of the building

AT THE END OF THE YEAR 2017 AND A GALLERY OF PORTRAITS OF MICHAEL GARICOÏTS' FIRST COMPANIONS, WHAT SHOULD WE RETAIN? THE NEF HAS INTRODUCED THE VERY FIRST DISCIPLES AND IN PARTICULAR THOSE WHO LEFT FOR AMERICA. IN TELLING THE STORY OF THE BEGINNINGS, WE REALIZE THAT IT IS ALSO MADE OF HUMAN STORIES, SOMETIMES JUST «LITTLE STORIES».

The founder does assure us: *"First God created our work, it is holy; men could not have even begun it"*; and he makes pray: *"My God, look not at my sins, but at the Society your Sacred Heart has conceived and formed"*. Of course many also took their part in building this community. The influence of Father Guimon is striking, to name but one; even though Father Garicoïts reproached him for a few things, including at the time of deciding on the mission in America. Yet the first companions did not always get what they wanted; the Catholics of Uruguay for example wanted Father Larrouy for Vicar Apostolic, even though he thought the suggestion was inappropriate, and Michel Garicoïts refused! Not too many honours for his religious men!

*"Brothers are needed for the priests of the community"*. That was the conviction of the founder from the beginning; Father Etchécopar tells us. He continues: *"They will be looked upon not as servants, but as brothers and co-workers; they will consider themselves in a holy and perfect condition because of their vows, their works and the fruit of their works, and they will behave not out of fear, but out of love."* Brother Arnaud Gaye opened the way for the brothers.

Arnaud too, the shepherd of Rieulhès (hamlet of Saint-Pé-de-Bigorre), was attracted by Father Guimon! In 1840 he was preaching in Peyrouse, close to Lourdes. In the confessional, the 25-year-old spoke of his idea of a vocation; the priest, in a hurry, replied: *"We will see later!"* A few days later, the determined man returned with his request; the missionary told him, *"At Bétharram, we are looking for brothers. You will be just like us, eat the same bread and meat, drink the same wine; there will be no difference between*

us ...", and mischievously he continues: "If you are greedy, you must not come; you will lose, because you will have your hands full of work!"

Within the family, everyone opposed Arnaud; the best-intentioned suggested he go to Garaison or to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He made his choice: *"The idea of Bétharram, the idea of being associated with the good fathers of Bétharram, that speaks to my heart!"* So he went to Bétharram. There he finds Father Chirou, always warm, but unable to decide for him. Soon afterwards, the shepherd pushes on to Igon and meets Father Garicoïts; only to find himself sent back to Father Guimon, since he had already spoken to him!

Would Arnaud be discouraged? He joined the army, then gave it up just as quickly ... On 24 March 1840 he was at the door of Bétharram's superior. For Father Garicoïts, there was only one question: what should he do with this lad given his background? First of all, he started studying at the school of Our Lady. Then a supervisor left and Arnaud's age meant he could replace him. Then the sacristan went away: with a cassock and a surplice, Arnaud provided the service instead. Later on the laundryman and the refectory manager were missing: Arnaud replaced them valiantly! Except that, carrying out so many duties, one Holy Thursday he forgot to extinguish the candles after the service ... and once, the table was not set at meal time, and Father Perguilhem, always accurate, had to wait ... and even worse, Father Bellocq, watch in hand, reproached him for any delay.

The sheep, they were patient! "I was so happy with my flock!" he says. Even Sister Marthe at Igon, realized that he was being asked to do too much; she spoke to Father Garicoïts: *"We must help this brother. Even if he had four feet and four hands, he couldn't get it all done!"* Finally, discouraged, he himself decided to leave: *"I have too much work!"* The superior replied: *"What do you want? I too have work, ten times more than I can do. Patience! We do what we can; God will not ask for an account of what we cannot do. Also you are getting on in years ... You know that God wants you here. Besides, I would be alone if everybody went away. I would have to hire a servant ..."* And so Arnaud stayed right until the end!

On his death in 1894, Father Etchécopar reported a stranger's testimony: "Who is this brother? Seeing him is good for me; he has the face of a saint", and he added, *"I think he was right; for my part, I had experienced the same impression many times; and only a few days ago, seeing this valiant brother standing, at work, following every aspect of the Rule, as if in full health, always the same, despite his swollen legs, almost without sleep and without food, always busy, seemingly tireless, always serene, I felt moved and I blessed God silently seeing such gentle courage, both ancient and young."*

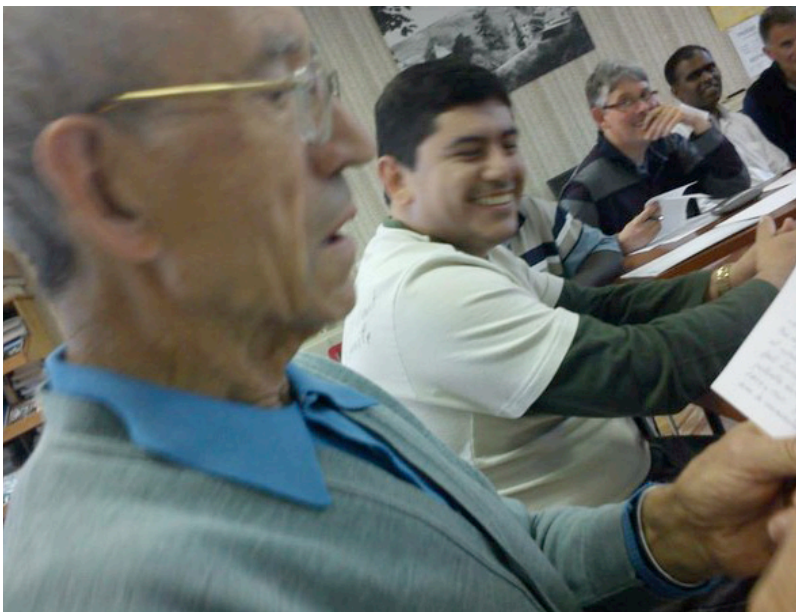
Following Brother Arnaud, in 1843 and 1844, other good vocations appeared. Those brothers were the joy of Michael Garicoïts: he particularly loved them! He went to meet them in their workshops. On asking him the reason for his visit, one heard the answer: *"The pleasure of seeing you!"*

Surely, the brothers constitute *"that part of the building to which the founder attached so much importance"* (Father Etchécopar). The brothers, present beside the priests, even silently, managed by their simple existence and simple life, to overcome the resistance of Mgr Lacroix: they made the birth of a true religious family possible.

Michael Garicoïts says of their place:

*"Brothers are needed by the fathers of the community (...) The brothers participate in all that is highest in the community, in the priesthood itself. They are the arms, the feet of the priests. They will have, if they wish, the greater part of the fruits of preaching (...) This is how you have to see things. It is necessary to exercise, in the narrow framework of its use, the immensity of charity. But if the ideas were as narrow as the room in which you work, and the feelings as low as the worktable, then it would be better if a millstone was attached to your neck and you were thrown into the sea."*





Throughout the history of the Congregation, the brothers are present. Even today, throughout the world, they are for their brother priests the living reminder of their common identity as religious. Since the general chapter of 2011, the title of the religious family is “Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bétharram”; even if it is a “clerical institution”, it is composed of “religious, priests and brothers” (see Rule of Life No.1).

The truth obliges us to recognize that the brothers did not always

have, “just like [priests], the same bread, same wine, same meat”; differences have existed, unfortunately! In the institution, some books – such as *Spiritual Master* – do not mention the existence of the brothers ... And yet when two young Béarnais men from Malaussanne, blood brothers, presented themselves to Bétharram, one to be a priest, the other to be a domestic, both became religious: one brother Léopold Duvignau died in 1986 in South America; the other, Father Pierre Duvignau, died in Bétharram in 1995; so how the oldest, the author of *Spiritual Master*, could forget his brother, Brother Léopold ...?

*“Brothers are needed from the fathers of the community”* today, as in the old days ... *“Be small, submissive, content and constant; and God will bless you,”* says Michael Garicoïts today, as he wrote on 21 August 1861 to Brother Joannès ...

Beñat Oyhenart SCJ  
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