



Painting by Juan Vladimír Martinovich

Listening to Saint Michael. . .

You must not believe that it doesn't matter that a Religious society is to be known by any ordinary name. When His Lordship saw that there were here the beginnings of a little community he was delighted; his first care was to give it a name. He spent a whole week looking for the name that would best suit it and he thought that he couldn't do better than to call us Auxiliary Priests of the Sacred Heart. This divine name, full of gentleness and of charity, would always be like an invitation for us to aim at what we had undertaken and be a model of what we should be.

Cachica Notebook, 7



Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

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NE

NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE
NOTICIAS EN FAMILIA
NOTIZIE IN FAMIGLIA
FAMILY NEWS

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A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

**The earth produces of itself,
first the stalk, then the head, then the full
grain in the head (Mk 4, 28)**

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The presence of the Congregation in Thailand is really a blessing from the Lord. Our missionaries worked hard to build the local Church in Chiang-Mai in a disinterested fashion and without relaxing. This resulted in countless conversions. Today, the number of young religious and vocations are the Lord's recompense for the generous dedication of days gone by.

During my last visit to Thailand, last December, I was able to see for myself other fruits in connection with the work of Betharramite missionaries on site. Two festivities provided the opportunity: the 8 December celebrating the 50th anniversary of the missionary foundation of the Immaculate Conception of Mepon and on 12 December the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Missionaries of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The first were founded by Mgr Lacoste SCJ, Bishop of Dali and first Apostolic Administrator of Chiang Mai. He it was who paid a visit to the others in Saint Sebastian to encourage them to come and work in his new diocese.

Mgr Lucien Bernard Lacoste SCJ was ordained Bishop of





Sr Cecilia, Superior General of the MMIC with two religious sisters who have made their final profession on December 8th

Dali in China on 21 May 1949 in Kuming. Expelled from China in 1952 with the other Betharramite priests they settled in Chiang Mai in 1954. When the real missionary ADN is present it is difficult to deny it. On 17 November 1959, Mgr Lacoste was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the new Apostolic Prefecture which was to become the diocese of Chiang Mai 18 December 1965. He retained the title of the See of Dali which has remained vacant since his death on 14 August 1989.

Mgr Lacoste and the Betharramite missionaries did priceless work especially for the Karens living in the mountains. The struggle to make their way through the mountains was soon rewarded by the consolation of seeing many conversions. This was made all the easier because the values of Karen society are close to those of Christianity. And thus it was that little by little the diocese got itself organised.

Mgr Lacoste thought immediately of

religious life for the effectiveness of the mission. This is why in 1965 when the diocese was being planned he began assembling some Karen women to prepare them as catechists and thinking that they could be consecrated persons. These consecrated women could take over some missionary posts, be a presence during the absence of missionaries; they would be mobile and be a bit all over the place! Sister Cecilia, Superior General and one of these first women, celebrated the 50th anniversary of her Congregation during the festival.

Today the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception number about 60 and are present in the dioceses of Chiang Mai and Nakon Sawan. They are of diocesan rite. Living in community they assist the priests in the different Mission centres both materially and spiritually; they are responsible for R. E. and the formation of the young, teaching them to sew and other skills. As was the wish of Mgr Lacoste they live with the people and like the people; they perform simple tasks and the people recognise their presence and their availability. It is good to see these sisters working in the fields, harvesting the rice and carrying out other tasks typical of Christian communities. Since they speak the language and are deeply embedded in the Karen culture it is all quite natural for them.

A group of some 70 people – priests, religious and laity – including two Betharramite religious who wanted to recall the Betharramites who accompanied these Sisters from their beginnings to go and spread the Word in the mountains.

How can we comment on the importance of Charpentier's undertakings? There is nothing there today; the place has completely changed; the actual buildings didn't even exist in his day; for three hundred years the rock continued to be eroded and the hill to recede. In 1625 the gift of Louis XIII allowed the construction on the rocks overlooking the chapel, of the Saint Louis Oratory; it will be the 5th station: the Crowning with Thorns. There were no other buildings until reaching the top. One can conclude that the intervening stations would have been signalled by a cross or some other sign. On the esplanade and facing the three crosses the construction of the Sepulchre was begun. It was only finished in 1639 and H. Charpentier had already left

Betharram in 1638. Neither the activities of the chaplains nor the great devotion by the presence of Calvary escaped the notice of Mgr Jean de Salette who on 9th June 1626 gave Our Lady of Betharram the title of Our Lady of Calvary. In 1661 the year of the consecration of the restored Chapel, there were still only four station-oratories, and the Calvary remained in that state throughout the whole of the 17th century.

Raymond Descomps scj (1916 - 2009)
in «L'Écho de Bétharram»



THE CALVARY OF BETHARRAM (2)

The first Calvary of the XVIIth century

1620. In Bearn the revolutionary spirit didn't give up. Despite the edict from Fontainebleau the Protestants refused to restore to the Catholics the properties which had been stolen. Louis XIII consequently set out for Bearn. In 1621 the troops belonging to the Duke of Epéron restored a kind of Peace. The

Bearn skies were still somewhat clouded when Betharram greeted the saintly priest, Hubert Charpentier. Introduced by Jean de Salette, Bishop of Lescar, for the purpose of restoring the pilgrimage to Betharram, H. Charpentier took a long time to make up his mind, according to the historian Marca; to wander into such dangerous rocks didn't inspire him at all. Father H. Lassalle explains: "It is difficult for us today to imagine what the wild countryside around Betharram was like then". For years H. Charpentier had shown his devotion to the mystery of the Cross. By 1622 he decided to join the cult of the Son with that of the Mother and to erect a cross on the top of the hill. "Furthermore he was being invited by a sign from heaven: the miracle of the cross which had been erected in September 1616. Consequently, H. Charpentier wanted to make quite sure of the truth of the facts then reported. The five peasant-witnesses



had to undergo further questionings; everything was tested: sincerity, health, and morality of the peasants; the police put the patience of these good people on trial until finally they had to admit that they were Béarnaise folk as far removed from falsehood as they were from malice. Thus encouraged

H. Charpentier have three tall crosses erected on the top of the hill on the spot where the miracle had taken place in September. This was the first Calvary of Betharram and it was inaugurated on Good Friday 1623. On the following 8th September it was to be the object of solemn celebrations. On that day the hill was threatened by a thunder storm which eventually receded. The pilgrims didn't fail to see there another sign of approval from heaven. But H. Charpentier had imagined an even greater project, equal to his devotions. Paintings or statues were going to show the main scenes of Christ's life before his Resurrection. Small chapels to house these scenes were built along the paths between the chapel and the top of the hill. The plan has come down to us in the shape of a stamp (see picture on the right). However, through lack of funds, neither H. Charpentier nor his immediate successors were able to realise the project.

They made a Pilgrimage for five days when they followed in the footsteps of the Missionaries from Maesarién to Maepon arriving just in time for the festival. The village folk joined in their prayer and provided them with food and lodging. This was a fine initiative which could easily be copied so as to become a diocesan even to keep alive the memory.

The missionaries of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary arrived in Maepon 50 years ago. In the beginning Mgr Lacoste entrusted them to accompany the missionaries of the I. C. to learn the life-style of religious living in community. Some years later they opened the Sewing Workshops in Chiang Mai to begin with, then in Payao. In these workshops they trained countless young people who today are mothers, priests or even religious. They recently opened a third community in Lampun. Of the missionaries who arrived in 1965 only three are still present in Thailand; the Lord has blessed them through the nine young Thai religious who pursue the mission in their country.

The missionaries of Ban Marina, as they are known in Thailand received from their foundress, Mother Marie-Thérèse Dupouy Bordes, the "priestly" charism: that of Holy Thursday (Jn. 13, 1) a Eucharistic, priestly and missionary spirit. What is their mission? To spread the reign of the love of God by developing vocations and missions. This is one more reason for their happiness on this feast day when their Mother Dupouy has been declared Venerable because of the heroic nature of her virtues. There are many links in the chain uniting Betharram with them. In the life of Mother Dupouy we come across the



The Superior General of the MSCJM (2nd standing from the right). Of the missionaries who arrived in 1965 only three are still present in Thailand. The other ones are local vocations, all in perpetual vows.

names of a few Betharramites – vocations which she directed towards us. During the generalate of Father Hyppolyte Paillas there was a question of bringing the two together so as to add to their number some young women who at Betharram were preparing to set out for China to help the missionaries already aided by the ones who were starting the missionary congregation. On the badge of the Sisters I noticed the FVD of Betharram. They used to collaborate with us in the college of Bazas in France and that of Sidi Bel Abbès in Algeria. Mother Goya helped us greatly for the formation house which we had opened for two years previously in Saragossa. Today we are working together in Thailand and in Tacuarembó in Uruguay.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj
Superior General



“Men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the Institute’s specific mission”.

John Paul II, Vita Consecrata, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 72 § 2

Fr. José Gogorza scj & Fr. Julio Colina scj
in community prayer in the new chapel of Mendelu’s community
(Vicariate of France-Spain)

Decisions by the Superior General & the Council

In the meeting of the General Council on January 15, 2016,

- the Superior General with his Council approved the **appointment of Br. Andrew Ferris scj as Superior of the community of Great Barr** (Vicariate of England), subject to the approval by the Congregation for the Institutes of the Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life. (Cfr. Rule of Life 206/a);
- the Superior General with his Council approved the **erection of the new community in Tiptur, in the diocese of Bangalore (Vicariate of India)** and the **appointment of Fr. Fernando Anthony Joseph Livin scj as Superior** of this new community. (Cfr. Rule of Life 206/b & a);
The Bishop has entrusted our Brothers with the pastoral care of this parish in which he has decided to build a new church and has planned the construction of a high school, in which our Fathers may minister.

In the meeting of the General Council of February 13th,

- as a reply to the request submitted by the Regional Superior of the Region Saint Michael Garicoits and considered the documents he presented, the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, decided to **dismiss Martial Mengué from the Institute**. (Cfr. Rule of Life 321).



GENERAL CHAPTER 2017

In the meeting of the General Council on February 13th, the Superior General with the consent of his Council (Rule of Life 205/a) welcomed the proposal of the Council of the Congregation, held at the Generalate from February 8th to 14th, regarding the date and venue of the next General Chapter:

The next ordinary General Chapter is going to take place in Paraguay from May 6 to 24, 2017.

The official convocation by the Superior General will be published in the next issue of the NEF (cfr. Rule of Life 182).

witness to our Christian Faith at the heart of the Muslim world. Year after year I have discovered the richness of the meeting with Islam which helps us to deepen our Christian Faith. But to achieve that, in the footsteps of Pere de Foucauld, we must admit that the Muslims are richness for us. Accepting the differences makes us grow in humanity and in Faith. It is a challenge to be taken up each day: "God so loved the world..." Even for non-Christians isn't this the "wonderful sight"?

We have to continually remind ourselves that we are following Jesus Christ by being his witness at the heart of the Muslim world. This is the mission "to go out" which we have received from Pope Francis. There are so many wonderful people amongst them! Last Christmas, the Minister for Islamic Affairs sent me his personal greetings saying: "Dear brother in the Faith!"

As I live my mission in this manner, I am rewriting "My Rule of Life" thanks to the daily messages sent to us by Pope Francis.

"The Bishop is first of all a man of prayer," before being a man of pastoral planning! How many times does he send us out on the way of gentleness, humility and devotion to duty! St Michael would be perfectly at ease. Then when he calls us to poverty which is not only material poverty, but accepting all those niggling little socio-political realities which don't always correspond to what I would like to do.

Endure the human, political and religious context over which I have no control and by which I must let myself be accepted and still continue to be what I am.

To live in such a context which is not secular and in which the idea of liberty is not like mine and where I must act with discretion remembering that I am "a foreigner for my hosts".

In the footsteps of Saint Michael, that is how I try to live out the vastness of love within the limits of my position.

+Vincent LANDELS



A MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP OF ROME

The prophecy of obedience

"IT IS BY RELYING, NOT ON OUR OWN STRENGTH, BUT ON THAT OF HOLY OBEDIENCE THAT WE CAN UNDERTAKE EVERYTHING WITH JOY AND HAPPILY ACHIEVE IT".

THESE WORDS, PRONOUNCED IN THE 19TH CENTURY BY SAINT MICHAEL GARICOITS, WERE ECHOED IN THE WORDS OF POPE FRANCIS ADDRESSED TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE JUBILEE OF CONSECRATED LIFE.



Men and women religious, that is men and women consecrated to the Lord's service, who in the Church pursue this path of arduous poverty, of a chaste love that leads to a spiritual fatherhood and motherhood for all the Church, of obedience. . . . There is always something lacking in our obedience, because perfect obedience is that of the Son of God, who emptied himself, who became man out of obedience, unto death on the Cross. There are men and women among you who live out an intense form of obedience, an obedience — not military, no, not that; that is discipline, another thing — an obedience of giving of the heart. This is prophecy. "Don't you wish to do something, something else?. . . " — "Yes, but according to the rules I must do this, this and this. And according to regulations, this, this and this. And if I don't see something clearly, I speak with the superior and, after the dialogue, I obey". This is prophecy, as opposed to the seed of anarchy, which the devil sows. "What do you do?" — "I do whatever I please". The anarchy of will is the daughter of the demon, it is not the daughter of God. The Son of God was not an anarchist, he did not call his [disciples] to mount a force of

resistance against his enemies; he said to Pilate: "Were I a king of this world I would have called my soldiers to protect me". Instead, he was obedient to the Father. He said only: "Father, please, no, not this chalice. . . . But Thy will be done". When out of obedience you accept something which perhaps often you do not like. . . [he makes a swallowing gesture]. . . that obedience must be swallowed, and it is done. Thus, prophecy. Prophecy is telling people that there is a path to happiness and grandeur, a path that fills you with joy, which is precisely the path to Jesus. It is the path to be close to Jesus. Prophecy is a gift, it is a charism and it must be asked of the Holy Spirit: that I may know that word, in the right moment; that I may do that thing in the right moment; that my entire life may be a prophecy. Men and women prophets. This is very important. "Let's do what everyone else does. . . ". No. Prophecy is saying that there is something truer, more beautiful, greater, of greater good to which we are all called.

Speech on Monday 1st February
(Extract)

THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

In the footsteps of the first scj Missionaries for 90 miles

IN THE FIFTIES-SEVENTIES, BETHARRAM RELIGIOUS CROSSED THE MOUNTAIN TRACKS OF NORTHERN THAILAND IN ORDER TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE ISOLATED VILLAGES. THEIR COURAGEOUS EXPEDITIONS WERE ENGRAVED IN THE MEMORY OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE, WHO RECALL THEIR LIFE WITNESS AS AN EXAMPLE OF MISSIONARY ZEAL AND DEDICATION. AS A TRIBUTE TO THIS MISSIONARY WORK AND TO THE SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (FOUNDED BY MGR. LACOSTE SCJ) WHO CELEBRATED THEIR GOLDEN JUBILEE OF FOUNDATION, SOME BETHARRAM RELIGIOUS ORGANISED A 5 DAY PILGRIMAGE. JUST ONE RULE FOR ALL: WALK, DESCEND, CLIMB UP... IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FIRST MISSIONARIES.

The pilgrimage began December 3, 2015 at Ban Huay Pong Lao, in Khun Yuam district (province of Mae Hong Son). The group was formed by Father Somphong, who began this initiative, Fr. Phairote SCJ, Fr. Bunlert, Fr. Sakchai a diocesan priest, 2 Maepon sisters, a catechist and a parishioner.

For half of stage one, the group was guided by a faithful parishioner of Huay Pong Lao. It was a real adventure. We had to climb a mountain, down along

a raging torrent, crossing streams and rivers . . . The path was honoured by the recitation of the Rosary and by personal prayer. After four hours of walking, we arrived at Ban Wang Kuang Tung where we were expected by the villagers who welcomed us and prepared lunch. Our guide went back to his village, we worked our way along the paved road to the village of Meto. The village priest, Father Jaroen, made us welcome. After a refreshing shower, the day ended with a Eucharistic celebration with the participation of the villagers. Fatigue was felt and some were happy to have a good revitalising massage.

The second stage of our journey took us along the paths travelled by missionaries "from another age". These trails had been abandoned for several years and we had to ask the help of a guide familiar with the area. Meanwhile, the group was enriched by three people. This was the shortest stage, approximately 25 kilometres.



rereading my life, my personal history in Betharram. I came to understand the point that everything I had experienced so far had prepared me to enter this new pathway. I thank the Lord for it. It was then that I thought of adopting "Listening" as a motto. What marvellous things I discovered by being faithful to listening, for love's sake!

Today I would like to say, even before Pope Francis had been elected, the expressions "peripheries", "country hospital", "go out", "kindness", "mercy", "pray for me", all found an echo in my life.

I discovered what a heart should be like which is "open to life". The Church in Morocco had greatly changed since the days of my youth. It was less numerous (about 30 000, all foreigners), but more cultural (more than 100 different nationalities), much younger with an average age of 30. This was the people that God had entrusted me with. For me it was a question of going out towards these people to get to know them, live close to them and become a "father and mother" for them. I was far from imagining the richness of this Catholic population and all its problems. My car had become my community base from which I was



Mgr Landel scj, Archbishop of Rabat (Morocco) and President of the Bishops' Conference of the Northern Region of Africa

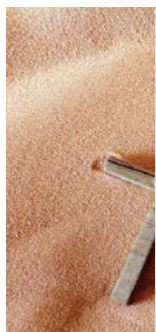
expected to go out to meet others. True enough there were the kilometres to be counted but there were also the cultural distances. It was not a question of smoothing things out but of allowing communion between all the Christians "around Jesus Christ and Morocco" Isn't that the Incarnation?

I try to become a Father servant, a Father who listens, a Father who is close by, a Father who greets, a Father who is communion. That is how the tenderness of the Father and his Mercy are made known. Helping a young nation to discover this loving Father who helps to break down all human barriers or religious ones and which we have built ourselves and where we tend to enclose ourselves, so that he finally discovers the freedom which flows from the Heart of God, real life and real love. It is then that we can really bear

PRACTISING THE RULE

The Betharramite 'Here I am' in Morocco

In 1999, Fr Vincent Landel SCJ was named as Auxiliary Bishop of Rabat, before taking full charge of the diocese in 2001. Ironically, this total availability implied a separation leading him to leave his religious family or at least to be away from it for a period of time. But blood will out, and our bishop still drinks from our common source and he lives the charism of Betharram in a Muslim country.



Article 9. As our Founder intended, the Congregation is a Religious Institute of Apostolic Life. Her mission continues the action of the Heart of Christ, the Incarnate Word, offering Himself to the Father to accomplish his will of salvation: to reveal to the people of our time the compassion, mercy and the loving face of God the Father.

The Spirit of our vocation and mission is: "like the spirit of Our Lord, a spirit of gentleness, humility and devotion, to gently draw sinners to penance and to imitate Him."

Although I am a bishop, I find it impossible to cut short everything in my past life and which helps me to be what I am today. St Michael's message has kept me alive and continues to keep me alive in the dynamism of Blessed Charles de Foucauld. The Incarnate Word has given so much meaning to their lives. So for me, to repeat the movement of the Incarnate Word, is the surge which gives meaning to my life today.

I would go so far as to say that it was true in my case from the moment John Paul II's call came through to me at the beginning of December 1999. As soon as I had hung up my telephone, after a term which had been particularly difficult at the college in Betharram, everything took on a new appearance; I was far from imagining

what my mission as a bishop was going to be, but the fact that in all conscience I had replied YES, had created a new birth in me. A few moments later I had the guarantee when the secret had been lifted and I saw everyone around me happy. At that moment a great peace took possession of my soul. My YES wasn't a kind of escape before difficulties but the answer to a deep call. This act of obedience to the Church opened up a new path for me, gave me freedom for I felt that I was entering the real way of God's Will. In the footsteps of St Michael I then knew that I must reply without hesitation, without reserve, for love, without knowing where it was all going to lead me.

After this YES pronounced with the power of the Lord, I suddenly had the idea of



The third stage of our pilgrimage was very similar to the first. Along the way, nine others joined us, including a lady of 74 years and a girl of 13. The trail climbed up the mountain, the highest we had to cross so far.

Inevitably fatigue kicked in. The initial plan was to spend the night in the forest, but after a big storm, we had to think of plan B, so we decided to rest in the shelter of the village of Ban Kong Bo: in fact, spending the night in the forest under these conditions would have been unsafe. Meanwhile, one of us took a detour to bring the Eucharist to the faithful of the village of Ban Din Kao.

Thus we come to the fourth day of our trip, with four new pilgrims including three girls of the Saint Joseph school run by nuns of St. Paul de Chartres.

Not knowing the road from Mae Chaem Mae Laek, we had to ask directions along the way. Then arriving in Mae Laek, none of us knew the villagers, although all were Karens. It was the end of the day,

and we did not know where to go. Fortunately for us, there was a Christian family there and within minutes all were ready to welcome us into their homes. The generosity of the people of Ban Mae Laek deserves great praise.

We came to the last day of our journey, and were due to meet up with another group of pilgrims from Huay Tong and Maepon East.

For these pilgrims, the journey had begun by listening to the story of the first evangelisation by the catechist Tuke, who knew all about the lives of the first missionaries, and with a homily from Father Chokdi Damronganurak, the Huay Tong priest. The trip was accompanied by religious songs and the praying of the rosary. The journey of these pilgrims lasted one day.

However, for those who left early in the morning, at dawn, the road was again an adventure: in fact, we could not follow the paved road but had to cross the slopes of Doi Inthanon in the forest, at the

risk of going astray. Thanks be to God, a local villager volunteered to accompany us and all was well.

For pilgrims who had been on the road since Day One, this day was energy-sapping. Father Sompong recited the rosary. On the way, we made some small stops for a breather, but soon we felt the cold of the mountain. It took nearly eight hours to cross the highest mountain in Thailand, Doi Inthanon, climbing to the east to join the paved road to the summit. The guide who accompanied us in the forest then returned to his village, while we headed to Maepon which was still several kilometres on, and no walkers knew the way.

Finally, we found a road sign which showed us the distance to reach our rendez-vous: 11 km, so still two and a half

hours of walking, perhaps more because of fatigue!

The other group had already been at the rendez-vous for three hours, but having contacted us by mobile, decided to wait for us so that we could arrive at the end of our journey together.

Finally, at about seven in the evening we all met and made our solemn entrance into Maepon. Forgetting our weariness, we concluded our pilgrimage in style with a Mass of thanksgiving for the protection received during our days walking. Father Sompong, in his brief homily, stressed that "even if some of us walked five days and other just one day, we all receive a blessing: God is always merciful."

Walking with Fr. Phairote Nochatchawan SCJ,
& Fr. Martin of Tours Thinakorn Damrongusasin SCJ



Vocation Ministry has been intensified. We can see the fruits here also in formation. In the house of Lambaré postulancy, we have 6 aspirants and 2 postulants. Brother Sergio Leiva made his first vows and Cristian Romero completed his theology in Belo Horizonte. As in Argentina, there are also five large colleges here that offer a service to society and the Church through education and evangelisation. As in Argentina, this service is only possible through the conscientious dedication of many lay people who share our mission in a spirit of communion and participation. The serene climate in the educational communities; better collaboration with the management teams, a prudent economy, solidarity between the works: these are some of the characteristics of our colleges. Father Javier, Regional Vicar of Vicariate is keen with his Council, to see that our property is also welcoming to the poor. For example, the College Sao Miguel, founded by the "Pai Saubat" for the poor children of the Chacarita neighborhood, receives economic support from the Vicariate, which with state subsidies and other support, allows this school to accomplish its educational and evangelising mission.

In this Vicariate, we also work in a missionary spirit in three parishes. We have just let go of the parish of San Joaquin to devote ourselves to Papetra project (see NEF No. 102 of 14 March 2015). The Vicariate has answered this call inviting it to show mercy to the suffering of young drug addicts and their families. One of our religious, Father Fulgencio Ferreira, acquired the skills necessary to

answer that call. A detox clinic has already been built, while a home "*El Hogar de Cristo*", for the recovery and rehabilitation of these suffering young people is under construction.

For 160 years, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Betharram has been accomplishing her evangelising mission with the Latin American Church. Arriving in Latin America shortly after the independence of Argentina, it has contributed to making this country a new and united society. It now maintains a humble presence in the four countries of the Region, while continuing the work of evangelisation. And it continues to walk with men and women of these countries in all their struggles sharing moments of holy encouragement.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj
Superior General

and spiritual presence in colleges; they animate the missionary meetings, activities with young people and missions among the rural poor. Although the number of religious has greatly reduced, the quality of consecrated life and community life is good: community projects are implemented; they pray together and personally; lifelong formation is a shared concern; an annual retreat and other activities are organized in the Vicariate. The pastoral promotion of vocations does bring vocations in dribs and drabs: we could do with more. But the little that is done is done seriously, because the more recent candidates are adults and have practised a profession, which is also a sign of quality.

The **Vicariate of Brazil**, unlike that of Argentina-Uruguay, is living a period of growth and great hope. The religious in perpetual vows are 17. Over the past two years six religious were ordained priests; one of them showed his willing availability in joining the international community at Mendelu, Spain, (requested by the General Chapter of 2011). Our religious congregation has been in Brazil long time, but it is only since a few years that we have had coloured religious, which both enriches the Congregation and better inculturates our charism. This has helped to inaugurate such new forms of presence to which I alluded earlier. The pastoral care of vocations, with its arrivals and departures is ongoing and we can already see the fruits: one aspirant at Passa Quatro, 3 postulants at Paulina, 2 scholastics in Belo Horizonte. Except

for the scholastic community of Belo Horizonte, the other presences of the Congregation consist of two religious each: Sao Paulo, Passa Quatro, Sabará, Setubinha, Serrinha. It is characterized by a parish presence diocesan style, very much as missionaries to the poor, but community life is rather fragile. The Missionary exchanges that take place between the parish of the Sacred Heart of Belo Horizonte and that of Setubinha are however very interesting: for a few days, laity and religious from Belo Horizonte went to Setubinha to visit families and accomplish a mission ; some time after, the laity and religious from Setubinha did the same thing in Belo Horizonte. Moreover, for Sabara, a mission for the year 2016 is currently being prepared with the collaboration of all the parishes of the Vicariate. The educational mission of the College Sao Miguel continues. The Vicariate is faithful to the meetings during which the life of the Vicariate is examined and the ground prepared for other options. Some problems related to the administration do overburden some religious with responsibilities.

The **Vicariate of Paraguay** currently has 19 religious. The return to community of our two Paraguayan Betharramite bishops, Bishop Gogorza and Bishop Silvero, and the ordination of two religious have recently increased the number of religious. Paraguay also has a religious in perpetual vows, Brother Victor, in the mission of the Montevideo-Tacuarembó community in the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay. In recent years, the work related to the

Overview of the Fr Auguste Etchecopar Region

AT THE END OF THE CANONICAL VISITATIONS IN ARGENTINA-URUGUAY, IN PARAGUAY AND IN BRAZIL, THAT TOOK PLACE IN 2015, THE SUPERIOR GENERAL FR GASPAR FERNÁNDEZ, SHARES IN THIS ARTICLE HIS VISION OF THE REGION. HIS REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMUNITY LIFE AND ON THE VARIED ASPECTS OF THE BETHARRAMITE MISSION IN LATIN AMERICA IS ENRICHED BY HIS PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH EACH RELIGIOUS.

Just like the St Michael Garicoits Region, the Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region has a long history. The first Betharramite missionaries arrived in Argentina at the end of 1856. Initially, their main activity was that of holding popular missions around the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding countryside, before reaching Montevideo, Uruguay. The San José college and Montevideo residence were founded during the lifetime of St Michael Garicoits, respectively in 1858 and 1861. Thereafter, the work of education tended to displace the work of popular missions, perhaps because of emerging needs. Some communities dedicated to education were reinforced by new religious, following the expulsion from France in 1903. (Communities like those of Montevideo, Rosario (1900), La Plata (1902), and the college of Asunción, founded in 1904). The educational mission thus intensified. Today the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay has nine schools; Paraguay has 5 schools and Brazil has one. For some it is a source of pride; for others, a burden that is increasingly difficult to manage.

That legacy has not prevented us from being open to other missions and from recovering our missionary zeal for the

poor, which has characterised us from the beginning: for example the summer missions in northern Argentina, the seven day missionary projects in Santiago del Estero province made by all our colleges, the Regional Community of Montevideo-Tacuarembó which supported the College centenary with a mission project in Tacuarembó (in the north), the rural parishes of Paraguay (of which remains only La Colmena), where we led popular missions, like in the parish of Ciudad del Este. In Brazil, two bishops asked us to withdraw from three important parishes that we had established. What at first glance, seemed to be gross ingratitude, proved to be a blessing that has given us the missionary impetus we needed to be more faithful to the charism of St Michael Garicoits. Thus by the grace of God, we are now present in Sabará, in the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, in Setubinha in the north of Minas Gerais, in Serrinha, in the State of Bahia: all places where priests rarely stayed very long.

In addition to sharing this missionary spirit, which is expressed differently in the three vicariates, religious and Argentina-Uruguay communities, Paraguay and Brazil have worked together for a long time. Since ELAB 1986, the superiors of

the Congregation understood that the three provinces would work better if they were coordinated. Father José Mirande was the first coordinator and Father Bruno lerullo which was the last in this role, right up to the end of the organization in regions . The Fr Etchecopar Region is quite homogeneous: the four constituent countries have many historical and cultural features in common while retaining their originality. Its vicariates share an ecclesial experience, characterised by a common history and a church life influenced by continental conferences of Rio de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida. Other church institutions, such as CELAM CLAR continue this leadership role. Furthermore, the election of Pope Francis gave a universal value to this church style. All this has helped the religious of our Latin American communities to walk together.

The Regional Councils, meetings of formators, religious bursars and lay advisers of the three vicariates have become genuine institutions and are held several times a year.

It is the only region that has held the interim Regional Chapter. It has the most committed laity in (Betharram) mission, who live very seriously our charism, and who have been invited to attend a pre-chapter meeting with the religious . The Novitiate like the Scholasticate allows young people to know themselves, to network, and to know the religious in other vicariates. This is where the Region is truly built. Formation in the Region has found a stability and a strength by having a postulant house in each Vicariate, a

novitiate in Adrogué and a scholasticate in Belo Horizonte. The formation of new formators is also a strong feature. Regular spiritual accompaniment has been strengthened; the young people in formation experience the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises; an Ignatian month

is experienced during the novitiate, while ten days are devoted to the Ignatian exercises every year in the scholasticate. Many scholastics have followed the course to give the Spiritual Exercises, and this prepares them for spiritual direction and accompaniment, which, in pastoral work, helps them to live a more authentic faith. Father Mauro has strongly insisted that this Ignatian spiritual preparation takes place. The will to strengthen the presence of Betharram in Uruguay was a decision of the Regional Chapter of 2010. The community is composed of Fr. Angelo Recalcati, (who has already lived for several years in Uruguay), Bro. Victor Torales (Paraguay), and Fr. Eder Chaves Goncalves (Brazil), who took over in January from Fr. Wagner Ferreira, now Master of Postulants in Paulinia.



The Region joyfully represented by its team of formators and by the Regional Superior last January in Rome at the Formators International Meeting

One of the Region's features is the collaboration of the laity in our mission. Thanks to our communion with, and the participation of the laity, the colleges have been transformed into educational communities that have a social, educational and evangelical function.

For their part, attracted by the religious, the laity wish to deepen the charism of Saint Michael, firstly to better achieve their Mission, but also to live it in their personal and family life. In our parishes we also work in communion with the laity. There is some resistance on their part to organise themselves into Betharramite associations. An exception to this is the FVD Group, started more than 10 years ago at the initiative of students and alumni of the San José Asunción College. This is now present in other areas of the city and offers to others the charism of St Michael Garicoits. In Argentina, the family group of laity Betharramite (Fa. La. Be) and Fr. Giancarlo Monzani do valuable mission work in different colleges. The past two years, the laity of Brazil participated with religious in the celebration of perpetual

vows and ordinations which have been numerous. In 2015 in Brazil, Bro. Jeferson took on board a project to gather laypeople who expressed a desire to learn more about our charism.

The Regional Superior, Fr Gustavo Agin, travels frequently in the three vicariates and closely follows both the religious and communities. The collaboration of the three Vicars is very close, especially in supporting missionary projects.

The Regional Councils are a place for common reflection and programming. And each in his Vicariate maintains fidelity to the Rule of Life.

The **Argentina-Uruguay Vicariate** has witnessed for a long time to a very significant presence of the Congregation. It is there that we find the great educational works. These works continue, but without the "grandeur" of the past, continuing to provide an educational ministry, with a social and missionary dimension, thanks to the generous dedication of many lay people. Father Daniel, Regional Vicar, is engaged in very serious negotiations with college principals, to find with them the best way of involving them in the management of the colleges. Seventeen of our Religious died in the last ten years. So the presence of the Congregation is a little fragile. The fifteen remaining religious form four communities: three in Argentina and one in Uruguay. There is only one parish, that of Barracas, and religious no longer live in the colleges, as before. From their community residences in San Juan Bautista, Barracas, Adrogué and Montevideo, they provide a pastoral