



Painting by Juan Vladimir Martinovich

## Listening to Saint Michael...

*How should we seek perfection? In the Rule? Yes in our rule, according to our place and according to the measure of the grace that God grants us. To act thus is to lead us to be straightforward with ourselves, to be friendly with our neighbour, and humble with our God, so St. Bernard says.*

Cachica Notebook, 68

"This is how  
God loves us..."

(Saint Michael Garicoits)



Happy Easter!



Societas S<sup>mi</sup> Cordis Jesu  
BETHARRAM

125  
2017

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NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE  
NOTICIAS EN FAMILIA  
NOTIZIE IN FAMIGLIA  
FAMILY NEWS

News bulletin of the Congregation  
of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram

A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

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## The experience of being missionary

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I will never forget that experience I had together with some priests and a group of young people in that forgotten part of inner Argentina which is the Province of Catamarca, where we used to go every year for the missions. One evening, Karina, Pablo and I visited an old lady whose physical fragility kept her at home. Saddened to not be able to leave the house, we told her straightaway 'Don't fret, Madam. Jesus is so good that since you can't go to the church, he who loves you so much and who knows everything, has decided to come to you. We have brought you communion.' Her face lit up, she exclaimed 'How beautiful it is.'

This missionary episode affected me a lot because it gathered together all the elements of activity of a missionary adult; we went out from the group to go to meet this woman; we entered into dialogue with her in her housebound situation. These same circumstances brought us to announce Jesus to



Mass at Santa Maria dei Miracoli church (Rome)

her, the word incarnate who is made close to everyone. They were the source of our meeting with her, of her meeting with Him, through communion, which was the most important thing. We reached the goal of every missionary: to announce Jesus as the person who loves this old lady and becomes close to her. This lady was filled with joy, and so were we, as we had managed to bring her the happiness that Jesus brings.

The lifestyle of a devotee might provoke refusal in certain people or certain groups, but it might also stir up reflection, when someone feeling respected – no matter what their convictions are – commits themselves in turn to respect the other person in their difference and to open themselves up to dialogue. Respect and opening up towards differences are the conditions for having a real encoun-

ter with people, including with Christ. The same thing can happen to those who are close to a religious community that lives faithfully in the joy of its commitment to vocation and builds up relationships with others that are steeped in joy.

*[The] mission [of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram] 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. » (RdV9)*

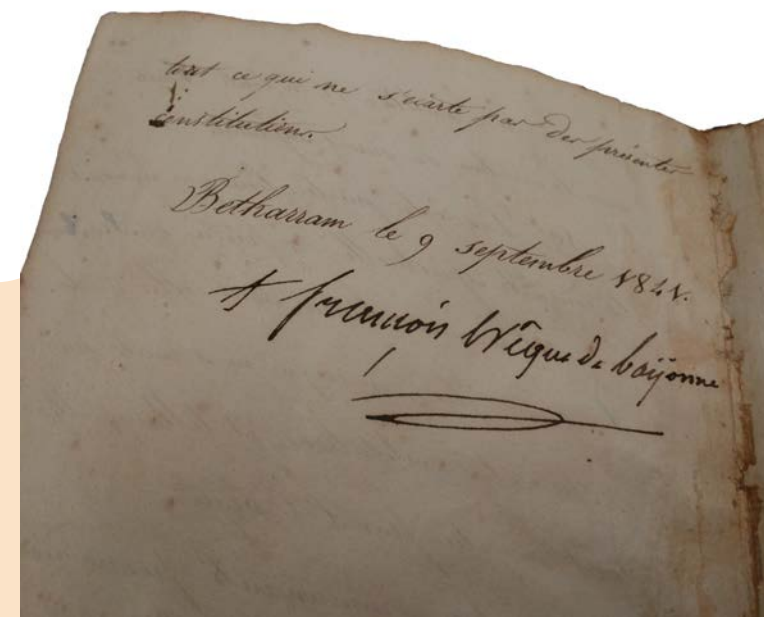
As missionaries, we are also disciples who have met Christ; we have loved him and have decided to live – to be – like him. In living like this, we are sent by Christ, the Father's chosen and well loved Son. The purpose of all this is the same for us as for him: to show the people of our time his tenderness and mercy, the loving face of God the Father. Sometimes we have so many activities that they take up all our time and make us lose sight of the purpose of our mission: little by little, we try to take the place of Jesus without ever managing to. That can even happen to the most holy ecclesiastical institutions.



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.

Beñat Oyhenart sci



Rule of Life of the "Diocesan Congregation of the Auxiliary Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, signed by the Bishop Lacroix in 1841

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 Garicoits :** *"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."*

For the rest of us, religious of Betharram, members of an institute of consecrated life, the mission is a fundamental element of our life that cannot be separated from the other parts: spirituality, devotion, evangelical brotherhood. If, in order to be genuine missionaries, we cannot do without our spirituality, our devotion, any more than our evangelical brotherhood, we cannot be so either without giving importance to the mission. It's a more important experience than any activity. And, in order to become missionaries, they must allow the experience of meeting Christ to happen. This experience of encountering the love of God in the person of Jesus, which has made us disciples, persists also in that other experience which makes us brothers in the community just as it does in giving to others, facilitating their encounter with Jesus, so that they too can know the same happiness as us. To see other people happy is what makes us missionaries.

*"Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we have for our programme the very programme of the Heart of Jesus the eternal Priest and Servant of the Father. Our mission is the continuation of the impulse of the Incarnate Word saying to His Father: 'Here I am', for the salvation of humanity. Following the Incarnate Word, whom 'the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (John 10.36) we in turn are consecrated and sent to be in the world, by our whole religious life, a sign proclaiming Jesus Christ. 'Religious life will be all the more apostolic as the gift of oneself to the Lord Jesus becomes more interior and the common life more fraternal and the commitment to the specific mission of the institute becomes*

*more ardent.'"*(VC 72,d) (RdV 13).

Our mission is not only the total sum of all these activities that are demanded by our pastoral responsibility. Often, our attention is taken up by activities which are not the most missionary-like. That is why it is important to take stock, in order to give priority to what is more missionary and which is characterised by total commitment to accompany people with gentleness and by welcoming them, to serve them as servants of Jesus Christ and to announce the Gospel to them, the person of Jesus, our Master and consoler. We can organise ourselves very well to carry out the mission and other good activities in our consecrated lives: meditation, confession, the community meeting, helping the poor. For example, when I am in Rome, I love to go on Mondays to serve an evening meal to the poor as a volunteer with the Friends of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.. After praying vespers, I go the Santa Maria del Popolo Church where the poor and the volunteers take part in Mass. At the end of Mass, we all go to the refectory where dinner is waiting for us. I help as I can, until 5 minutes before my community's meal, which I feel is important to take part in. I prefer to help in the first service. But one day, when there was a lack of volunteers, I stayed to the end. It also happened that I came back after eating. I cannot say that my help was indispensable. And no-one was shocked when, after helping out, I went back to eat with my community.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj  
Superior General



## SNAPSHOTS OF BETHARRAMITE LIFE

### Following the example of Jesus



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*When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table.  
'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am.  
If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet.  
I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.  
'In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him.  
'Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly.  
Jn 13, 12-17*

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Fr. Elie Kurzum scj and Fr. Jose Kumar scj celebrating Holy Thursday in Holy Land last year

## THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF MICHAEL GARICOITS

### Siméon Fondeville, the confessor of Father Garicoits

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 Garicoits: "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



arrangements for welcoming all the people who would turn out for the occasion. Monday, February 27, the ceremony began with the Eucharist, celebrated by the Vicar General of the Diocese, preceded by a presentation on the history of the work made by the missionaries for the village throughout the years. Tuesday, February 28th, the solemn Eucharistic celebration was presided by Mgr. Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, Bishop of Chiang Mai. The village festivities were wound up by a communal meal. Many Betharramite religious came from different communities and joined the celebration.

### Youth Summer Camp ►

From March 26 to April 2, the Betharramite "Holy Family Catholic Center" opened the doors to welcome a hundred or so young people arrived from the mountain villages to attend this week-

long course of catechesis. The theme of the course was "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." All the events were inspired by these words of the Gospel: meetings, time for reflection and prayer, and entertainments. The summer camp was planned, organized and managed by the personnel of the Ban Pong Centre, led by Fr John Chan SCJ, superior of the community, Fr. Peter Mayoe SCJ and Fr Alberto Pensa SCJ. The week ended with a solemn celebration presided by Mgr. Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, bishop of Chiang Mai, during which he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to some youths.



### *In memoriam...*

We received the news that **Mr. Jean-Baptiste Salla**, brother of Fr Bertrand SCJ and of Fr Pierre SCJ (of the community of Saint-Palais) has gone to the Lord. We assure Fr Bertrand, Fr Pierre and their family members of our prayers.

On April 4, at Paina di Giussano (Italy), **Mrs Luigia Longoni**, mother of Fr Antonio Riva SCJ, of the community of Lissone, returned to the Father's House. We entrust her to the mercy of the Lord and we pray Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to console her family.



### Reality and life versus resignation and survival

**EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER DURING THE MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS AND CONSECRATED PERSONS IN MILAN, SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD, MARCH 15, 2017.**

Today, reality - due to many factors that we cannot stop to analyse here - calls us to take directions more than to strike poses, to struggle for unity more than to attach ourselves to conflicts, to listen to reality, to open ourselves "to the masses", to the holy faithful people of God, to the whole church. We open ourselves to the whole ecclesial reality. (...) Let's move on to one last thing. I would not dare to tell you to which actual marginalised people your mission should be directed, because the Spirit has normally inspired charisms to send you to the margins, to go to people and places usually abandoned. I do not believe that the Pope can tell you: "take care of these or those people". What the Pope can tell you is this: you are few, few, you are what you are, go to the peripheries, go to the margins to meet the Lord, renew the mission of your origins, in the Galilee of your first encounter, Return to the Galilee of that first encounter! And it will do us all good, it will make us grow, it will give us a harvest. I now have in mind the confusion our Father Abraham experienced. He was made to look at the sky: "Count the stars!" - But he could not - "So shall your offspring be." And then: "Your only son" - (the only one, the other was already gone,

but the latter had the promise) - "Bring him up to the mountain and offer me a sacrifice." From a multitude of stars, to sacrificing his own son: the logic of God is hard to understand. We can only obey. This is the road you must take. Choose the peripheries, awaken the signs of life, set alight the once dead or absent hope of a society that has become insensitive to the pain of others. In our fragility as Congregations, we can become more attentive to the many fragilities that surround us and transform them into spaces of blessing. It is the moment when the Lord will say to you: "Stop, look, there is a goat. Do not sacrifice your only son." Go and bring the healing of Christ, go. I'm not chasing you, I am just telling you to go and bring your charism to the mission of Christ.

And let us not forget that Whenever we put Jesus in the midst of his people, joy will be found. For this alone will bring back our joy and our hope, this alone will save us from living with a 'survival' mentality. Don't be fatalistic. Don't just survive, but come alive! It is only this which will make our life fruitful and keep our hearts beating. Place Jesus where he should be: in the midst of his people.

## TOWARDS THE GENERAL CHAPTER

### San Bernardino awaits us...

The name of the small town of San Bernardino is not related to the saint but to President Bernardino Caballero who ruled Paraguay on 24 August 1881, the official date on which German settlers founded the city a few years after The Great War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870). Several great legends tell the origins of San Bernardino. Our beloved Fr. Alonso SCJ collected some of these stories in the book: *San Bernardino, sus leyendas y su historia* (Asunción 1996), a copy of which is kept in the library of San José College.

One of these legends speaks of two brothers who are said to be the ancestors of the Guaraní: Amarasó and Paraguá. The latter, who lived near the Tupa-Icua spring, decided to build a village there which went on to arouse the admiration of all. It should be noted that the two brothers had survived after the island of Atlantis had been swallowed up. Obsessed by the memory of this town, Paraguá took the lead in digging a deep well to find the yellowish substance able to illuminate the nights of this beautiful place. But he obtained only one result: the spring waters became turbid and began to bubble, day and night, until the day they submerged the whole village. It would appear that the site was inhabited before the lake was formed. On one of his excursions on horseback on our lakeside site, Fr. Alonso found remains that some people associated with the presence of a native cemetery.

The fact dates back to 11 January 1946 and this discovery was made public in the newspaper of the time, "La Tribuna". Not all historians are convinced that it is a native cemetery, but it is certain that this beautiful lake, which we admire today, has not always existed. There was a time when it was a lagoon, or a swamp, populated by indigenous peoples. The dictator José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (who held absolute power from 1814 to 1840 and expelled from Paraguay all the priests and religious people who did not wish to take an oath of obedience and submission to the dictator) had the idea of building a dam where the waters of the lagoon meet to form a large reservoir of water. The lake thus formed was used for river transport. Although fairly well used, the service was nevertheless interrupted due to periods of drought and several accidents. There is also the legend of the blessed or exorcised waters: it is said that around 1600 Brother Bolaños intervened to bless the rising waters which, during a great flood, had overwhelmed several indigenous villages and threatened to flood important villages in the Pirayu Valley. Thanks to this divine intervention, the waters calmed down and turned into an enchanting lake. These waters are doubly blessed because another legend claims that a local person found a statue of the Virgin of Caacupé (the national sanctuary of Paraguay) in a rustic trunk floating on the waters.

seminary of St. Paul Abadjin Kouté. The theme of the retreat was: "Lent, a new beginning to deepen our life in the Spirit."

### France-Spain

**Bétharram** ► Monday, March 20, in the Solemnity of St. Joseph, the religious of the Vicariate held an Assembly in Betharram to reflect on how to bring new life to Betharram, and trying to devise new projects to discuss in the General Chapter. These are the points in the agenda: Betharram as a foundation place, the elder religious, ministry in the Nay area, building refurbishment.



### Paraguay

**Priestly Ordination** ► On March 25, the day of the "Here I am" (Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord), the city of La Colmena (Paraguay) was dressed to the nines. In fact Fr. Alcides Riveros Diaz SCJ, a native of this place, was ordained as a priest. The ordination Mass, concelebrated by many betharramite religious and the emeritus bishop Claudio Silvero SCJ was



*The newly ordained Priest, Fr. Alcides SCJ (right), with Fr. Juan Pablo SCJ, ordained on Dec. 8, 2016*

presided over by the emeritus bishop Ignacio Gogorza SCJ.

The newly-ordained priest recalled with gratitude and emotion his own vocational journey, emphasizing the value of his family "of poor and humble condition". May the Lord make him a shepherd according to His Heart.



### India - Thailand

**A welcoming celebration** ► On March 2, the Sampran community and the Thai Vicariate rolled out a warm and cordial welcome to our new community member, Rev Fr Valan Peter SCJ member of the Indian vicariate.

We wish him a fruitful stay and all God's blessings for his ministry in Thailand.



### Thailand

**60<sup>th</sup> anniversary** ► February 27-28, the Betharramite family in Thailand organized a grand celebration for the 60th anniversary of Huay Tong mission, in the region of Chiang Mai. Huay Tong is a Karen village on the mountains in the Northern Thailand. Well in advance, all the villagers worked hard to prepare this event, making



## BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE CONGREGATION



### Vietnam

**Welcome guests** ► Last March, the community of Ho Chi Minh City welcomed Fr Luke Kriangsak Kitsakunwong SCJ, Master of Scholastics in Sampran (Thailand), two Vietnamese brothers residing in the formation house of Sampran, Joseph Vu Van Tuan and Peter Do Va Hung, and a Thai scholastic, Br. Thanit Panmanikun.

Fr Luke visited the families of the young Vietnamese brothers, in order to know better the culture where they were brought up. He could also spend some time with the Vietnamese community recently established.

As for Br Thanit, he will spend two months in Ho Chi Minh City. This will allow Fr Sa-at to have a confrere in the house while Fr Yesudas Kuttappassery SCJ (responsible of the residence of Ho Chi Minh City) - who has been invited by the Superior General to the General Chapter - will be in Paraguay.

## R e g i o n



### Holy Land

**Assembly** ► From March 16 to 23, Fr. Jean-Luc Morin SCJ, Regional Superior, visited the communities of the Vicariate. Sunday, March 19, the Vicariate Assembly was held. The Regional concluded his visit in the community of Bethlehem, where he met the novices.

### Central African Republic

**Lent is a time to grow** ► In the morning of Saturday, March 25, the Betharramite religious went on a one-day Lenten retreat to the hermitage Saint Padre Pio of the Capuchin Friars at Bouar. Fr Bassani, Capuchin, gave a reflection on a passage taken from Pope Francis' Message for Lent 2017: "The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift".

All the religious spent time in silent prayer to reflect on their relationship with God and with the people.



**Vocation promotion** ► On March, 18, the Saint-Michel Community, Bouar organized a weekend of vocational discernment. The day began with the celebration of the Eucharist and it was marked by some significant events: spiritual reading about Saint Michael Garicoits' life; talk by Fr Arsène; rosary; interviews with Br Armel and meditation on the Gospel of the day. We entrust to Our Lady of Betharram these youths and their life projects.

### Ivory Coast

**Retreat** ► From Friday, March 10 to Saturday 11, the Adiapodoumé community held the Lenten retreat. The reflection was given by Father Jean Kouassi Bonzo, rector of the major

This is the story of San Bernardino, a small town that extends to the shore of the blessed Ypacaraí lake. In summer it is one of Paraguay's most popular holiday destinations. Those who had the economic means bought land and built beautiful holiday residences, just 50 km from Asunción.

San José College has a beautiful site on the shores of the lake, called "*campamento*", where since 1940, pupils and religious people became accustomed to spend their holidays. In 1995, when this camp was used for purposes that were no longer in harmony with the objectives promoted by the Congregation, this encampment was forbidden, even if the

group in question continued to gather in other places, because some students are convinced that the spirit of the San José College belongs to this famous "encampment".

The Congregation owns another property which is precisely the place where the General Chapter will be held: Mr. Lloret, a great benefactor, has donated about 40 hectares to us. Almost all of the land was divided up and sold; however an old colonial house has been preserved, where meetings and spiritual retreats were held for a long time. It is this house that has been restructured and enlarged to accommodate nearly 130 guests who wish to organize meetings or spiritual



retreats: a service currently very much in demand in Paraguay.

Welcome to San Bernardino, a place protected by divine blessing! Our

house, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, wishes to offer you an unforgettable experience, conducive to the future of the Congregation.

Tobia Sosio scu



Betharram  
Retreat House  
at San  
Bernardino



Betharramite family as a son of Saint Michael Garicoïts.

*I am aware that I am never alone: God is always beside me and He knows me more than I know myself. Living in the Congregation I have learnt many things about its charism and the lifestyle. This fostered my spiritual and intellectual growth. I am very grateful to God, to Betharram and to all the people who have been helping me so far. I believe that what I am now is God's plan for me.*

My name is **John Bosco Sommai SopaOpaad** hailing from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Ban Dinkhao Maejaem in Chiangmai. I was born on 10 December 1985 and I was baptized on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1998, at the Ascension Parish at Meapon by Fr. Carlos Rodriguez, a Betharramite missionary. My father's name is Mr. Dumrong and my mother's name is Mrs. Papho SopaOpaad. I have two younger brothers and I am the eldest son in my family.

When I was 11, I discovered my vocation while attending primary school. I remember that my mother played a key role in showing me the way towards the priestly life. She used to question me when I was young, "Would you like to be a priest, my son?" "Who is a priest and how can I become a priest?" I used to answer. Once she asked me, "Do you know Fr. Pedebideau? I like him, he is a holy and dedicated priest who lives a simple life style with the enthusiasm so typical of a Betharram missionary" This short description made by my mother instilled in me the idea of becoming a priest in the future. I could often see Fr. Pedebideau come to my village by walk carrying a bag. He would never get tired to proclaim the good news of Christ from village to village, ready to go anywhere overcoming all the difficulties just like a commando, carrying peace and joy like saint Michael Garicoïts.

Later on, I came to know more about Betharram thanks to Fr. Prasit Kunu a Redemptorist religious who was my Parish Priest at that time. At the end of my primary school, my mother asked him to find a place for me in a seminary. Fr. Prasit sent me to Maepon center in 1998. There I could see the life style of the Betharram missionaries and I appreciated them very much. I was impressed by their community life and their enthusiasm in following the spirituality of St. Michael. I reflected upon my vocation to follow Jesus Christ as a son of St. Michael Garicoïts, our founder. I really thank God for His unconditional love and care for me. God extended his protective hands through various situations and people throughout my life, particularly when I had to face troubles and difficulties. I believe that God had His plan for me in the Betharram family. God surprised me and he is still working in an unbelievable way in my life. I tried my best to further understand my place in God's plan, and to respond to Him according to his plan. I love to climb on the top of the mountain like Saint Michael to find the will of God, to feel His presence in the world and in the people I meet in my everyday life.





a radical choice or a madness but for me it is one of the greatest achievements of my life, because "I know in whom I believed" (my motto).

Today, I live in Setubinha (Minas Gerais) and I bear witness by my life to the joy of consecration. I say especially to the youth that Jesus Christ continues to walk with us and that by his gaze, he calls us with love to follow him. He who let himself be seduced by God's gaze, full of tenderness and He who accepts with generosity to embrace promptly the consecrated and missionary life, will find true joy. This first fascination will never end if it is accompanied by an attitude of faith and zeal for the things of God, as St. Michael lived.

20 March 2017, St. Michael College

My name is **Alfonso Prasert Pitakkiriboon**, hailing from Ban Hoay Hoi and belonging to St. Paul's parish, Ban Hoaytong, Thailand. I was born on 17 September 1984 and I was baptized on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1998, at the Ascension Parish at Meapon by Fr. Carlos Rodriguez, a Betharramite missionary. My late father's name was Mr. Paje Pitakkinriboon and my mother's name is Mrs. Kaomahen Pitakkiriboon. I have three elder sisters and I am the youngest son in my family. I joined Betharram in 1999 and I did the Novitiate in India (2009-2011). I made my first profession on 14 May 2011 at St. Garicoits Church, Chomthong, Chiangmai. I finished my



Br. Sommai scj (left.) and Br. Prasert scj (right)

Philosophical and Theological studies in Lux Mundi College, Sampran, Nakhom Pathom, Thailand. I made my final profession on 18 March 2017, at Ban Betharram, Chiangmai, Thailand.

I discovered my vocation while attending primary school at my own village Ban Hoy Hoi, when the Parish priest came to my village. I was impressed by him and my father asked me, "My son would you like to be a priest?" At that time, I did not know what to be a priest exactly means, but my father took me to the parish priest, Fr. Caset, a Betharramite missionary. When I saw Fr. Caset celebrating the Eucharist, he made a good impression on me and I felt so happy that later I told my father that I would like to be a priest. After I finished my primary school, Fr. Caset sent me to the Betharram seminary at Phayao.

Later on, when I joined the Betharram seminary, I came to know what it means to be a priest. Being in the Seminary, I learnt more and more about the lifestyle of a religious and the Charism of St. Michael Garicoits. I was happy to live in the seminary and prepare myself to be a religious priest in the future.

I have been reflecting on my vocation during the many years of formation and I learnt to follow Jesus in the



## P A R A G U A Y M A R C H 2 0 1 7

The international press has reported the recent violent events in Paraguay. We had a terrifying night. The excessive

police repression only exasperated protesters opposed to the proposed amendment to the Constitution that a group of senators were trying to impose. The purpose of this amendment was to allow the re-election of the President, which is currently excluded by the Constitution. The violent repression, seen live on television, degenerated into acts of vandalism: a fire was lit in the senate, and cars were set on fire, and a young political leader, one of our parishioners of La Colmena, who had taken refuge in the premises of the Liberal Party, was killed during clashes between police and protesters.

In an attempt to disarm the dangerous climate of revolt that has spread to many cities, the President of Paraguay, Horacio Cartes, summoned the main political leaders around a table in the presence of the Archbishop of Asunción.

Last Wednesday, a first attempt at dialogue took place in the absence of the main opposition party. An appeal by the Episcopal Conference had recently warned that the draft amendment could provoke violent reactions among a population that was tired of its politicians and dissatisfied with the way they gained power and remained in power, the memory of the dictatorships still powerful among many people. Unfortunately, this appeal was not heard. Public order is really in danger; It will be difficult to silence the protesters, if this project - which is unconstitutional from all points of view - is not withdrawn. In all the religious colleges and parishes there are organised vigils of prayer so that new violence does not break out.

At this moment the waters seem calm... like Lake San Bernardino... Let's hope that all these events do not stir the mud that lies in the discontent of many people.

## LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

### Newly final professed

**SATURDAY, MARCH 18**, IN THE CHAPEL OF THE COMMUNITY OF CHIANG MAI (THAILAND), FR. AUSTIN HUGHES SCI, REGIONAL SUPERIOR AND DELEGATE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, RECEIVED THE FINAL VOWS OF BR. JOHN BOSCO SOMMAI SOPA-OPAAD AND BR. ALFONSO PRASERT PITAKKIRIBOON (REGION OF S. MARY OF JESUS CRUCIFIED, VICARIATE OF THAILAND).

**SUNDAY, MARCH 19**, IN THE CHAPEL OF THE COLLEGE OF PASSA QUATRO (BRAZIL), FR. GUSTAVO AGIN SCI, REGIONAL SUPERIOR AND DELEGATE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, RECEIVED THE FINAL VOWS OF BR JEFERSON SILVÉRIO GONZAGA SCI (FR AUGUSTE ETCHEPAR REGION, VICARIATE OF BRAZIL). THESE WERE TWO IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION!

DEAR BROTHERS, WE WISH YOU ALL THE BEST! BE MORE AND MORE JESUS' FRIENDS AND DO NOT HESITATE TO "RUN TO EMBRACE LIFE'S CALL."



My name is Jeferson. I am 31 years old, my parents are Alfonso Gonzaga and Angela Maria Silvério Gonzaga, and I have a sister, Jane Silvério Gonzaga. I lived with my family in a farm about three kilometers from a pretty little town in southern Minas Gerais (Brazil). Educated with fervor in the Catholic faith by our parents, my sister and I have frequented the parish a lot. Today, my family still lives in Carmo de Minas, but in the town and no

more in the country side. They have not forgotten their origins and they do return from time to time to this earth where it all began. I do not lose too the opportunity to return to the San Francesco farm, of which I keep many memories, especially the call of the Lord to follow him. I will tell you in few words. I was very young, still a child to say everything, that already I felt uncomfortable in the midst of many activities of the farm. There was the noise of the machines, of the peasants who passed by singing and all the other noises related to the daily activities. I remember the silence that reigned at last in the evening when all the workers went home and the machines were extinguished. One could then listen to the voice of nature, animals and birds. I used to feel a great sense of peace. I was going out to walk alone along the fields and on the paths of this peaceful place. Little by little I realized that I was not really walking alone, but God was walking by my side. In the garden of our house, we have a beautiful bronze crucifix planted in the midst of the flowers. It became the goal of my walk. I was passing long moments contemplating this crucifix. I do not know very well if we were talking to each other or if I was praying... I would not be able to say ... but yes most probably it is so! The only thing I know is that in this place the Lord invited me to follow Him. And I accepted.



are unfathomable, and his providence is extraordinary. Thus, in May of the same year, I met the vocation promoter of Betharram, i.e. Father Paulo Vital. Father Paulo spoke with great enthusiasm about his Congregation and the availability of a man who, without delay, was always ready to put himself at the service of others. This man was St. Michael Garicoits. Availability, service, the Here I am ... exactly what I was aspiring to. Animated with the desire to know better Saint Michael and Betharram, I did not hesitate to pronounce my 'Here I Am'. I wanted to be a Betharramite!

On 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2007, with six other youth, Father Paul Vital as formator in Paulinia (San Paolo), I started my formation in Betharram as an aspirant; as a candidate in Passa Quatro (Minas Gerais), in 2008; as a Novice in Adrogué (Argentina) from 2008 to 2011, as a scholastic in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) from 2012 to 2015. It was a long journey marked by faith and hope with my eyes fixed on Our Lord Jesus Christ. What strikes me most in Saint Michael is his constant zeal in the service of the Lord, without delay, without calculation, without regrets, out of love more than for any other motive ... Always "Here I am" was my source of inspiration all along these years. Faithful to this inspiration, I have definitively confirmed my commitment to follow the will of God on Sunday 19 March this year at 10 am in St. Miguel College in Passa Quatro, in the day of my perpetual profession in this religious family. For many, it seemed



With the help of my old parish priest, Mgr. Cruz (presently emeritus), we made a discernment and together we discovered that the Lord was calling me to follow him as a consecrated religious. This was not a great surprise to my family, which already had eight consecrated persons, including nuns, priests and a bishop; moreover, I had been an altar boy already for six years at the parish, and as my mother often said: "This child does not leave the church, if he wishes, he too will become a priest!". No sooner said than done. After a long period of preparation, from 1999 to 2004, I entered the St. Pius X Seminary in the diocese of Campanha (Minas Gerais) in February 2005, and stayed there until mid-March 2006; While following the course of philosophy in Três Corações (MG), I decided to leave the diocese, driven by the desire to become a consecrated religious. The designs of God