



Painting by Juan Vladimir Martinovich

## Listening to Saint Michael...

*Personality is more than simply distinction. Jesus Christ was not just another man, his person was the Son of God.*

*Before creation there was Space; It was the immensity of God.*

Cachica Notebook, 44



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

123  
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 vocation

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Pope Francis wonders if many religious and priests are acting as functionaries, guardians and gatekeepers of holy mysteries rather than as humble servants, close to the people, fired by joy, passion, and a Spirit of mission. These priests and religious are defined more by the things they do than by the inner experience of vocation, which seems lacking in them. These priests and religious are incapable of revealing, in the midst of all that they do, what is at the heart of the inner and outer life of the consecrated person: the mystery of the encounter with the God of Love, in the person of Jesus. In all these outside activities, it is impossible to perceive the intimate experience that once gave their life a new impetus and a powerful motivation. If this experience were to be real again, it is so strong that it would translate into attitudes, words and deeds of joy, and a missionary zeal.



With such signs the life of the priest or the religious would be a challenge capable of deeply stirring the people he met. In fact, the activities carried out by a priest or a religious must result from the fundamental spiritual experience of vocation. Above all, and as the driving force for all the rest, vocation comes from an encounter with the person of Jesus. An encounter arising from a word, an act, an attitude, a relationship, which seems like a call to the depths of oneself: a call which demands an answer, and which will not leave us in peace unless we respond from the same depths, even if the proportions are different. God loves me with boundless love, and I answer him by the offering of all my being, which is infinitely less than His, but which is all I have to offering.

The encounter occurred when I became aware that God was behind this stirring: God who showed me his great love, and in return has aroused my small love, the only answer I could give. This

experience requires an accompaniment: this will enable me to verify for myself whether God beckons me by this call, or whether it is an illusion or just my imagination.

The new *Ratio Fundamental* *Institutiones Sacerdotalis* (Formation Guide for Priests Congregation of the Clergy, 8/12/16) underlines the priority given to the accompaniment and vocational discernment for young seminarians on the part of the formators (educator and spiritual director). This accom-

paniment may be lacking, or rather irregular, infrequent and inconstant; In this case, discernment will be erroneous. Progressing in vocation, the initial experience, as a response to the call of God (an encounter that calls us) risks being obscured or displaced by other priorities, e.g.(i) priority given to academic studies and the consequent prestige (ii) the search for a position, even a pastoral one, which will allow me to live an easy life (iii) by gelling with certain people, gradually attaching myself to them, to the point of refusing any change of community or mission (iv) because money manipulated during my ministry ensnared my heart, to the point of forgetting my original purpose, becoming a businessman rather than the man of God I ought to be.

Sometimes a young person in formation has deep wounds of which he is unaware, but which prevent his first call from being clear, from growing and becoming a pivotal experience for him. It should give

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 refund 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 Fonderville 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' 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.

Beñat Oyhénart scj

## THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF MICHAEL GARICOÏTS

### 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 Garicoïts? 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 Garicoïts 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

meaning to his life, helping him experience adversity, not as a disaster, but as an opportunity to grow and mature. Sometimes these wounds cause the religious or the priest to conceal by his conduct, the identity of priest or religious that is rightfully his. He wears a mask to hide his fragility, and if he reveals himself before others, it is without being aware of it. Far from being on fire with the strength and mystery of his vocation, he presents himself as a biblical expert, a specialist in the sacred, a promoter of fashionable devotions... The statistics of the increasingly frequent abandonment of religious and priestly life send us an alarming signal. This constant and persistent loss has reached damaging proportions in addition to the lack of vocations in certain countries ... This phenomenon has multiple causes.

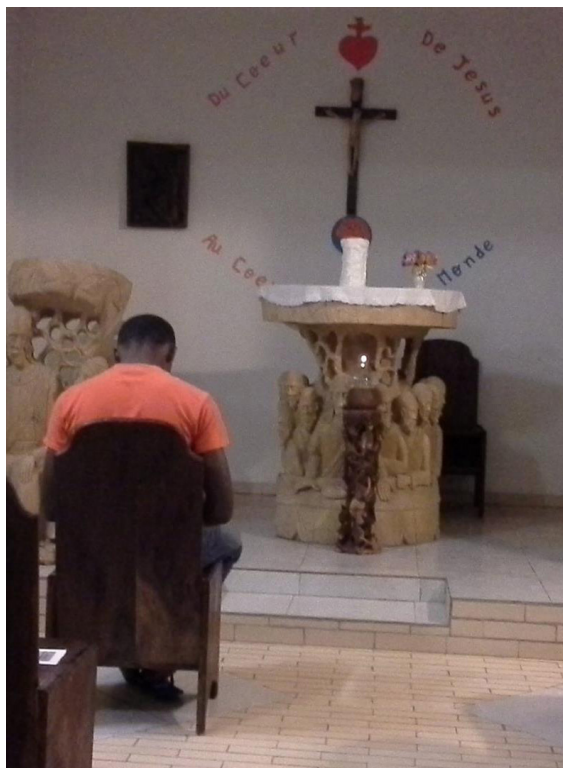
Among these, there is one that seems decisive to me although it is seldom mentioned in the dynamics of vocation, especially that of vocational fidelity. I refer to the experience of the vocational call, in other words to the consciousness that one has of it. In fact, without the consciousness of being called, the vocation does not exist, any more than the possibility of a path of formation or a path of a lasting fidelity. When this consciousness exists, the person sets out, with all that he is, at the service of the plan of life to which God calls him. When it disappears or diminishes, the first vocational experience disappears, and the vocation itself runs into great danger. This is what has motivated many departures among those who lost the enthusiasm of their first call. If this joy is lacking, it is impossible for them

to live their vocation with devotion and in a spirit of service, and they eventually abandon it (Jesús María Palacios Alcántara, “(In)consistent”, Publicaciones Clar-etianas, Madrid 2016, p. 42-43). The initial experience of vocation does not end with entry to the pre-postulate or the novitiate; On the contrary, it must continue to grow and strengthen, in contact with reality, through experiences, relationships, studies, and especially accompaniment during initial and ongoing training. This vocational experience, mature, integral and realistic, is at the foundation of perpetual vows and priestly ordination. With perpetual vows and ordination, it becomes effective and operational. A mature vocational experience makes the religious a joyful witness of Love and an indefatigable seeker of God, especially among life's wounded, to console and care for them, restore their dignity by revealing to them that God loves them and that they too can love Him - and thus achieve “the same happiness”.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj  
Superior General



### Conversation



« ... a privileged moment, where God speaks to us  
"face-to-face as a man converses with a friend". »

### A brother in Central Africa

**Unexpected invitation** ► January, 11, 2017 - Mother Prema Pierick M.C., the Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of Charity visited their community in Sojan, a place located 20 km away from Hojai. Since it was the first visit to the place, the local superior invited us to join them for the Eucharistic celebration and the felicitation. The sisters of Charity do a wonderful mission in the locality, taking care of the poor, the sick and the needy.

### Thailand

**Celebrations** ► 18 December 2016 - Good news for our Thai vicariate. A busy day for Betharram Sampran community where the preparation for our 4 brothers to receive the ministry of Reader and Acolyte was going on.

At 5 pm we began with the Eucharistic celebration presided by the bishop emeritus of Chiangmai diocese, H G Joseph Sangval Surasarang. Bros Jacob

Thanit Panmanikun and Peter Rawee Poempoonvicha were instituted Readers and Bros. Andrew Monop Kaengkaew and Stephen BanJoerd Chunsuklertthavikul received the Ministry of Acolyte. Bishop Joseph gave a reflection on the successful mission of Betharram in the Chiangmai diocese and urged us to follow in the footsteps of our missionaries. He said that the ordination to priesthood is not the completion but the beginning of our mission and he invited us to constantly pray for our mission and for vocations. May God bless our new readers and acolytes.

**Recollection** ► The Community of Sampran held its monthly recollection on 19th of January 2017.

The meditation was given by Rev Fr. Somkiat from Bangkok Diocese. The main theme was the life of Jesus, source of inspiration for the religious.



### *In memoriam*

On January 22, **Sr Jeanne Murtagh**, of the Congregation of Saint Joseph of Lyon, died in Birmingham.

Sr Jeanne was 92 years of age and 70 years of religious life. She was a faithful and long standing collaborator in the English translation of the NEF.

We entrust her to the Lord in our prayer.

May the Lord be the reward for all the good she has done and give her the happiness He has promised to His good and faithful servants.

### Region



#### Central Africa

**Assembly** ► Wednesday, January 4, the religious of the Vicariate of Central African Republic held the Vicariate Assembly in Bouar, at St Michael community. The purpose of the Assembly, chaired by the Regional Vicar Fr Pozzi Tiziano SCJ, was to prepare the Regional Chapter to be held in Bétharram (France) on January 19 to 24.

### Region



#### Argentina-Uruguay

**Summer Mission** ► In the first half of the month of January, a group of 60-odd young people organized the traditional summer mission. Split in various groups, they visited some very interior places of the Santiago countryside, where the priest can pay only occasional visits. This is the witness of one participant missionary: "We were 12 in my small group, just like the apostles of the Lord. We carried out the mission in a cluster of hovels in a place called Santa Cruz. No electricity, no gas, no drinking water were available. Adding to that, the scorching sun seemed to beat us. But our joy made us overcome all these difficulties. We lived these days side by side with simple, generous and welcoming people. They offered us the best they could afford:

mate, corn pancake (tortillas) and some chairs so that we could sit and speak about God. We threw up games with the children and the youth, while the adults were looking on in amusement. We concluded our mission with a Eucharistic celebration. The farewell was heartbreaking because we had grown very fond of them. May God bless them all".

### Region



#### India

**Priestly Ordinations** ► On 10 and 12 of January, the Indian Vicariate welcomed with great joy the priestly ordination of two religious.

On January 10, the Deacon Anthony Siluvai SCJ was ordained as a priest at Nellaiyappapuram (Tamil Nadu) by the laying on of hands of His Excellency Yvon Ambroise, bishop of Tuticorin.

Two days later, His Excellency Ayhipozhyil, bishop of Allaphey ordained as a priest Jacob Biso Puliampally SCJ at Manasserry (Kerala).

On both occasions, the faithful of the native parishes of our two confreres expressed their firm faith and great joy in different events proper to their own tradition and culture.

The family of Betharram rejoiced with Anthony and Jacob in thanking God the Almighty for all His graces granted to the Congregation and especially to the Vicariate of India.



### A fragile treasure

**IN ITS PLENARY SESSION, THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE DEALT WITH AN IMPORTANT TOPIC - POPE FRANCIS SAYS: BEING FAITHFUL TO AND LEAVING ONE'S VOCATION, PERSEVERANCE IS PUT TO THE TEST...**

...Vocation, like faith itself, is a treasure we carry in clay vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4: 7); That is why we must take care of it, as we take care of the most precious things, so that no one will steal this treasure from us, and that this treasure does not lose its beauty over time. This care is a duty that is above all for us personally, who have been called to follow Christ more closely, with faith, hope and charity, cultivated daily in prayer and reinforced by a good theological and spiritual formation that protects us against passing fashions and cultural fads and allows us to progress by being strong in faith. Only on this basis is it possible to practice evangelical counsels and have « the same feelings as Christ » (Phil 2: 5). Vocation is a gift that we have received from the Lord, who has « looked at us and loved us » (cf. Mk 10:21), calling us to follow him in the consecrated life. But it also implies a responsibility for the one who has received this gift. With the grace of the Lord, each of us is called to assume responsibly a personal commitment for his own human, spiritual and intellectual growth, and at the same time to maintain the

flame of his vocation. This implies that in turn we always have our eyes fixed on the Lord, always paying attention to walking according to the logic of the Gospel, without succumbing to the criteria of worldliness. So many times, great infidelities begin from small diversions or distractions. In this light too, it is important to hear St. Paul's exhortation: « now is the time for you to awake from sleep » (Rom 13:11) [...]

**From the speech of Pope Francis on Saturday 28 January 2017**

### Widen the space of your tent...

**"THIS CONGREGATION HAS COMPLETED ALL CANONICAL REQUIREMENTS TO BE OFFICIALLY PRESENT AND PERMITTED FOR PASTORAL WORKS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HO CHI MINH CITY. THIS COMMUNICATION FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HO CHI MINH CITY (SIGNED BY THE EPISCOPAL VICAR FOR CONSECRATED LIFE, FR. THOMAS VU QUANG TRUNG SJ) GAVE THE OFFICIAL SIGNAL OF THE BETHARRAMITE PRESENCE IN VIETNAM. THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT RECOGNITION.**

Although our community is made up of a small number of religious, the Diocese of Ho Chi Minh judged that our charism was a wealth for the Vietnamese Church. Basically, that is the meaning of our presence in Vietnam. Our intention is not to found great works. We have come here, but not because we are short of vocations in Europe but because we are convinced that our charism is a benefit for the whole Church and that it should not be relegated to a limited area.

Even before Betharram was present in this country, our charism was welcomed by two young Vietnamese men: Joseph Tuan and Peter Do, who are currently scholastics in Sampran, Thailand.

Like a small seed in the furrow of Vietnamese history, our presence has become a focus for vocations in a year and a half.

Several young people have already experienced a period of vocational discernment. Some of them are already members of our family: in addition to the two young people who live in Sampran, a third young man lives in our seminary in Mangalore (India). Another young man is going to leave for Mangalore soon. Others will soon be welcomed into the Betharramite community of Ho Chi Minh City.

Let us recall that this presence was only possible thanks to the "Here I am" of two

young Betharramite religious: Father Yesudas Kuttappassery (India) and Fr. Albert Sa-at Prathansantiphong (Thailand). Their enthusiastic and resourceful spirit (characteristic of the beginnings of any mission) has supported them in the face of difficulties. They knew how to bring their faith and courage into action. Having witnessed their first steps in Vietnam, I can say that the Lord has blessed them and through them the whole Congregation.

Our presence was also made possible thanks to the Bishop of the Diocese of Thanh Hoa (Mgr Joseph Chi Linh) who, by putting at our disposal a part of the diocesan seminary in Ho Chi Minh City, gave us the opportunity to set up our presence benefiting from a very warm welcome.

Our presence has been possible thanks to many benefactors in Europe and Latin America who, sensitive to the Betharramite mission in Vietnam, have offered economic assistance to support the fledgling community.

Our presence was made possible by many Vietnamese Christian families who, after learning about the community, helped them to meet their daily needs, supplying food, money and liturgical furnishings. These families gave especially to our brothers the certainty of being surrounded by friends,

### Session of the Council on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**The Superior General, with his Council, invited three brothers to the next General Chapter:** Fr. Sergio Gouarnalusse of the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay ; Fr. Yesudas Kuttappassery of the new community in Vietnam & Fr. Angelo Recalcati as assistant secretary.

With the advice of his Council, **he approved the Acts of the Regional Chapter of the Saint Michael Garicoits Region.**

As a reply to the request submitted by the Regional Superior of the Fr Etchecopar Region, the Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the **acceptance of the Santa Isabel de Portugal Parish in Paso de los Toros, in the diocese of Tacuarembó-Ribera** (Fr. Augusto Etchecopar Region, Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay)

**The Superior General, with the consent of his Council,** decided to **present to the priesthood the Deacon Alcides Ramón Riveros Díaz** (Vicariate of Paraguay, Fr. Etchecopar Region).

■ The Superior General, with his Council, acknowledged that Fr Serge Braga Latta contracted a civil marriage. Hence, he does no longer belong to our Congregation (RdV 317; CDC 694,2).

### Session of the Council on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017

#### The Superior General, with the consent of his Council,

##### ...admitted to final profession

**Br. Jeferson Gonzaga** (Vicariate of Brazil, Fr. Etchecopar Region),

**Br. Sommai John Bosco Sopa-Opaad** (Vicariate of Thailand, St Miriam Region)

**Br. Prasert Alfonso Pitakkiriboon** (Vicariate of Thailand, St Miriam Region)

##### ...decided to present to diaconate

**Br. Prasert Alfonso Pitakkiriboon** (Vicariate of Thailand, St Miriam Region)

**Br. Sommai John Bosco Sopa-Opaad** (Vicariate of Thailand, St Miriam Region)

##### ...decided to present to priesthood

**Dn Katé Dédé Constant** (Vicariate of Ivory Coast, St Michael Garicoits Region)

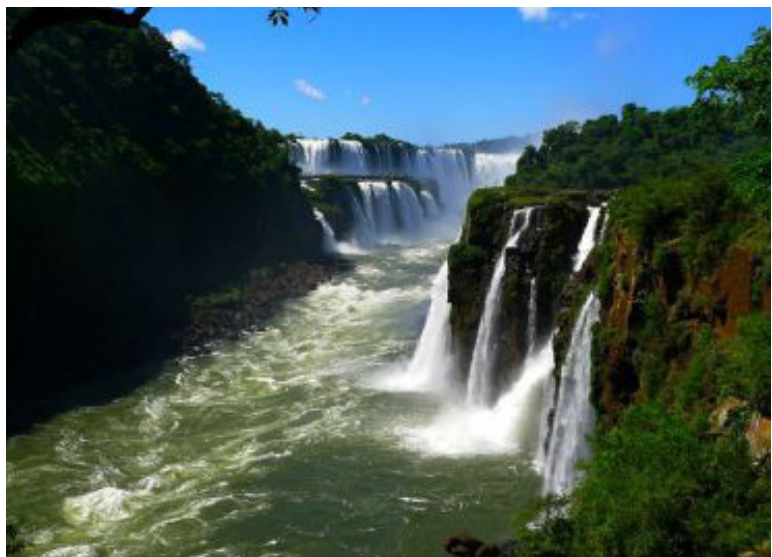
**Dn Valentin N'Zoré** (Vicariate of Ivory Coast, St Michael Garicoits Region)

**Dn Armel Daly Vabié** (Vicariate of Ivory Coast, St Michael Garicoits Region)

**Dn Marie-Paulin Yarkaï** (Vicariate of Central Africa, St Michael Garicoits Region)

With the advice of his Council, **he approved the Acts of the Regional Chapter of St Miriam Region.**





which Paraguay is at the forefront of the world. Public health and education services are those of an underdeveloped country. There is and will be no land "without misfortune": the challenge is to train citizens to be more aware, less selfish and more

Paraguayan people: kindness, solidarity, hospitality, artistic and musical talents. Anyone who has known Paraguay will always feel nostalgic about it.

As the plane descends, you see large new buildings, symbols of the remarkable economic growth of the last years. There is, it is said, a lot of money in the banks, interest is high and the macroeconomy is doing well. The same cannot be said for the microeconomy.

Politically, there is a lack of training in citizenship. President Stroessner's 35 years of military dictatorship had a negative impact on the participation of the majority: it was forbidden to speak openly and express opinions, and of course people were not able to vote. Today, democratically elected governments succeed each other, but the mechanisms of control by both the citizens and the institutions themselves are insufficient: this encourages corruption, in

committed to the service of the country. It is the mission that Pope Leo XIII entrusted to the first Betharramites when they arrived in Paraguay in 1904. Through education in our 5 beautiful colleges, through parish ministry and social services to the weakest people, our mission continues to be current and attractive.

Paraguay is waiting for us: without superficial prejudices or judgments, simply with our desire to know, to listen, to value, to learn, to forgive. It is certainly a blessed people, open and sensitive to everything that comes from Ñandejara [God] and from the Virgin Mary, as the waters of Ypacarai Lake are blessed, on whose shores the General Chapter will be held. Blessed waters is the etymological meaning of the name Ypacarai, for Brother Bolaños blessed them in his time to remove evil spirits.

Tobia Sosio scj



*In the middle: Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez, Superior General, with Mrs Kieu-Dung Nguym, who put her house at the disposal of our community.*

even brothers and sisters.

Our presence was possible thanks to a Christian lady of Vietnamese origin. I would like to pay tribute to her for a moment. Mrs. Kieu-Dung Nguym has a beautiful house in the center of Ho Chi Minh City. From the United States, where she has lived for many years, she came to know through a Vietnamese priest friend (Father Dominic) that we were looking for a new residence for our small community. She quickly offered us her house without asking anything in return, except to live there and "take care of it". Thus, in a very providential way, our community found its home for the next few years. Is it definitive? Maybe not. It will be necessary to examine further whether it will be possible to buy a property.

I like to think that what I have just related is the intertwining of the history of God with the history of the Congregation and to recall that if God's plan is accepted in the will of men, nothing and no one can stop it. His providence will always accompany us. The story continues, it is only in its beginnings... Others will tell more...

Graziano Sala scj

## One year and a half in Vietnam

**A NEW FOUNDATION IS MADE OF SMALL STEPS. OUR CONFRERES, FRs YESUDAS AND ALBERT GO OVER THEIR FIRST PERIOD IN VIETNAM. AFTER OVERCOMING THE FIRST ADMINISTRATIVE HURDLES, BETHARRAM IS GETTING A Foothold AND settling DOWN.**

*God's providence continues...* As I arrived in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam I had no idea about this new country and its culture. I had not known anyone, I did not speak the language; everything was new to me. People do not speak English and it was difficult to communicate and to express our needs. My problem was to find out how to get the visa for a long period. I tried to communicate the needs to the Vietnamese priests where I was living but to no avail; they said that it is difficult to get the long term visa for people coming from abroad; again I was discouraged. How is it possible for me to solve this problem? I remembered the words of Saint Michael Garicoïts: "forward always forward." It was God's providence that I met Fr. Thomas Trung who is the episcopal vicar of the diocese. He said he did not know much about the visa but that there were priests from India living here for many years, and he introduced me to frs. Jerrin and Felix who belong to Guanellians. I contacted Fr. Jerrin who took me to a catholic visa agent and introduced me to him; they promised that they would get the visa for Fr Sa-at and myself. We submitted all the documents and after a couple of days we got the visa with work permit. We thank God for this wonderful work! It was God's providence. As we started our community, we had 6 candidates from different parts of Vietnam. It was not easy to handle the situation but everything went on well

although we had to face some problems and difficulties. Some interference in the formation made us think about changing the place. But where? Again God's came to help us in the person of Fr. Dominic (Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament) and his friend, Mrs Kieu-Dung Nguyn who lives in the USA. This lady is ready to give her house (for four years) for the formation of our young boys without paying any rent: we have only to take care of the house for her. All her family members in USA are happy about this. Fr. Dominic took the initiative to find some sponsors and have a small chapel in the house. People are very supportive and helpful. They are very happy to know about Betharram and its spirituality. At the end, with the help of some people we made a small chapel and some renovations. Then in the presence of the Superior general, Fr Gaspar, and the Bursar General, Fr Graziano, and Fr. Thomas Trung we blessed the chapel and the house. The next step was to register our names in the local police station; once again God's Providence helped us to overcome this hurdle: Fr. Dominic asked his friend, a lawyer, to come to our rescue. The lawyer, a catholic, was very happy to help. Through his friends in the police he managed to settle this matter. We experienced God's Providence at every step. God always protects his people who walk in his footsteps. Many people now are coming forward to help us. We believe that

## The social and economic situation in Paraguay

**PARAGUAY: THE LAND OF GREAT WATERS. THIS DETAIL IS ENOUGH TO MAKE THIS TERRITORY A COVETED PLACE. THE PARAGUAY RIVER FLOWS FROM NORTH TO SOUTH, WHILE THE PARANA RIVER SERVES AS A BORDER TO THE EAST AND SOUTH.**

The two hydroelectric power stations built on the Parana constitute the greatest wealth potential: Itaipu, which last December broke the world record for electricity production with 100 million MWh and the Yacyreta power station also figuring among the largest in the world. Admittedly the water resources are to be shared with Brazil and Argentina, and the debt contracted for the construction of these plants still weighs heavily, but the future is promising. Paraguay therefore presents itself to visitors as a beautiful country with great potential. For some, it's a kind of Switzerland of the Americas. With nearly 7 million inhabitants and a territory of just over 400,000 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the fourth largest exporter of soya beans worldwide and the sixth largest of beef; a fertile land which offers the possibility of three crops per year and which does not suffer earthquakes or major climatic disturbances. It is one of the countries with the highest growth rate (more than 14.5% in 2010). According to a survey published some time ago, this is the country where people say they are happiest. Young people are numerous: a quarter of the population is between 15 and 29 years old. Another interesting aspect is bilingualism: Guarani and Spanish are the two official languages. 90% of the population speaks Guarani, but most people also speak Spanish. In everyday conversations, they prefer their mother tongue and particularly

when they want to express deep feelings. In short, the appearance is Spanish, but the heart is Guarani, which is clearly seen in traditional dances.

There are some very large fortunes, 38% of the population make up the middle class, while 20% live in poverty and do not have access to essential goods: the unfair distribution of wealth, rampant corruption and an administration with inadequate resources are certainly negative factors and cause widespread discontent. It is rare, however, for a Paraguayan to complain about his situation. He is able to say that he is well, even when he feels oppressed; he lives dreaming of better times and places, of the famous land "without misfortune," so rooted in the Guarani heart.

In recent decades, there has been a high level of immigration, particularly from the East and the Arab countries, attracted by the commercial growth linked to the Itaipu plant. Significant communities of Europeans have also made it possible to repopulate Paraguay, after the genocide of the war of the Triple Alliance. In 1870, after the massacre, there were only 116,350 inhabitants, only 10 per cent of whom were men, youths and adults. This explains the compelling need for repopulation and the large number of single mothers and children not recognized by their fathers. However, these disturbing aspects do not blot out the human qualities of the



*The spiritual exercises with the rules for the Discernment of Spirits (The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises) which I began during my novitiate is carried out till today and thanks to the Jesuit spiritual directors who help me to be in touch with my feelings and inner self. With humility I am able to name, claim, tame and aim the feelings within me which are helpful in coming to contact with my true person. The very project of interiorising and exteriorising my life with true renunciation according to the Gospel values and practising the virtues Christ and His Sacred Heart gives me a new vision of my life.*

*Thanks to the meditative words of Fr. Gaspar Fernandez in every issue of the NEF, with a goal set before me and looking at Christ, my interior Master, I am able to offer myself without any reservation to the Lord to become a joyful religious.*

*I always set before me the words of my spiritual director that I have to be a person steeped in the wisdom of the Cross to ultimately realize that Calvary is the only way to meet the Risen Lord. My life in our congregation moves me to genuinely desire God's will and be truly open to God and the events of life. As I have fully surrendered myself to the Lord in our religious family, the rest of my life is going to be a process to come to maturity of spirit, to bring my soul to an ever-deeper knowledge of, and an ever-greater sensitivity to the Spirit of God. As the years pass by, I become more and more rooted in the life God has called me and in the life I have chosen in my family of Betharram. The charism of St. Michael is the lifeblood of our religious*

*family. St. Michael must be reincarnated for us Betharramites in the people we know and love today. That is what I am trying to put in practice in my diaconate ministry place, St. Anthony's Shrine, Tuticorin, Tamilnadu, and trying to 'read the face of God' in knowing how he wishes me to respond to the concrete apostolic demands of my life. Nothing could be such a source of strength and encouragement to me, in my human pilgrimage as a missionary of Betharram, as the realization that I have a God who chose to experience fully our struggle to live by faith in the midst of darkness. I am called to be, and can become, like him, not by my own efforts but by the same gift of grace of God.*

Dn Michael Bistis scj



God send his people to support us. Believe in the providence of God...

Yesudas Kuttappassery scj



During this one and half years experience in Vietnam I felt like the baby practicing walking. But this walk is guided by the grace of God who has a plan for me. He provides everything for me through the project which the Congregation put in my hands, even though I didn't agree with some details of the project: for example about receiving the candidates immediately. In my opinion for the first year I preferred to see, to learn, to live and to study the language and then start to receive the candidates. But through the present situation, I can understand the reality of life and the system of formation in Vietnam. I would like to summarize my experience in 6 dimensions.

*The human dimension;* What I learned and practiced in my formation years, I continue in my daily life as a priest here. Of course, I have to do more than my seminarian life, I have to be an example for the candidates, I have to learn from the priests, from the religious, from the candidates and from the people in Vietnam. This is what I have been trying in this period in Vietnam.

*The spiritual dimension;* every day, I pray and ask God to give me a conscience to live, to listen, to do and to speak. I always believe that if I do the will of God, He will do everything for me; I only try my best. And God provides everything to me through different groups of people in Vietnam and from others places.

*The community dimension;* this is the big

challenge for me: to teach the candidates how to live the community life. The community life is to accept the differences of the people, of culture and the background, of the family.

*The intellectual dimension;* before teaching others how to do something I have to practice it myself. It is a great time for me to learn the language, the culture, the life style and what are the real and important needs in my religious life.

*The missionary dimension;* One and half year is the time for me to see, to listen and to learn. I will try to open myself to God and to people. *The cultural and social dimension;* I like the Vietnamese culture and the life style. Vietnamese people are very friendly. They give great respect to the priests and they are very active in their faith. But as a Betharramite I have to bring the charism of the congregation to Vietnamese culture. Of course the culture is very important but not all the aspects of the culture is appropriate for the religious life.

I would like to thank God for providing everything for me. Thanks to Mgr Joseph Nguyen Chin Linh Archbishop of Hue and Thanh Hoa, thanks to all the fathers and brothers in the center of Thanh Hoa in Saigon; a special thanks to Mary Nguyen Thi Kieu Dung the owner of the house where we are living now; thanks to Fr. Dominic, a person who provided this new house for us; thanks to different benefactors and to all those who help us in different ways here in Vietnam.

Please continue to keep us in your prayer. Cam on (Thank you)

Albert Sa-at Prathansantiphong scj

## The new offspring of Saint Miriam Region

THE END OF THE YEAR 2016 WAS MARKED BY THE FINAL PROFESSION OF FOUR OF OUR BROTHERS: MICHAEL, JESTIN, EDWIN E VIPIN. THEY SHARE WITH US THE FIRST STEPS OF THEIR VOCATION. THE WHOLE CONGREGATION JOINS THE VICARIATE OF INDIA WHICH HAS JUST CELEBRATED TWO PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS (FR ANTONY SILUVAI AND FR JACOB BISO PALIAMPALLY).

AT PRESENT THE ST MIRIAM REGION IS IN THE LIMELIGHT, BUT THE GENERAL COUNCIL ANNOUNCES IMPORTANT FESTIVE OCCASIONS IN THE OTHER REGIONS TOO.



During my childhood, I had an opportunity to participate an ordination in my parish. It inspired me

to be a priest. After my high school studies that desire was very strong. I expressed my desire to my parents and family members. A few family members are related to fr Biju Antony Pathalookaran SCJ. They helped me to know about the congregation of the Sacred Heart Fathers of Betharram. They requested me to wait for two years in order to complete my higher secondary studies (PUC I & II). After two years I met Fr Biju Antony and Fr Paul Manavalan and I joined the congregation of Betharram in the year of 2006. The initial formation helped me to know more about the congregation. I strongly realise that God calls me to be a humble Betharramite priest in the family of Betharram. During the Novitiate, I experienced the fraternal love of the family of Betharram

and I was inspired by the words of St Michael Garicoits "Go forward". So that I could make my first profession in the family of Betharram. The international session at Betharram, enhanced my vocation by experiencing the footsteps of our founder. With this experience, I could make my final profession and I was ordained as a deacon recently in the family of Betharram. Presently I am doing my diaconate ministry with Fr Paul Manavalan in one of the parishes of Ernakulam Archdiocese at Kerala. I am very glad to express my gratitude towards God and all my formators who are helping me to grow in my religious life. I would like to say one thing that if a person is called to serve for God, surely God will help him. I thank all the fathers and brothers for their prayers and support. Please continue to pray for me so that I will be humble and faithful to the family of Betharram.

Dn Jestin James Marottikkal scj



I'm Dn Xavier Vipin Joseph scj. I belong to the Vicariate of India (Saint Miriam Region). I came to know about the family of Betharram through Late Br. Josy who introduced me to Rev. Fr.

Paul Manavalan who is our vocation promoter and spiritual guide. I owe my love and sincere gratitude to them. There were many peculiar moments which had a great influence on my life as a Betharramite,

which nourished a sense of belonging to this family. The Religious International Session 2016 was one of those peculiar moments where I interiorised the fascinating insights on Life and Spirituality of St. Michael. On 11th of November 2016, I made my final profession and committed myself for my whole life in the family of Betharram. It was the moment when I said yes with my heart to follow Jesus with passion and love forever. These incredible experiences gave me lots of motivation and hope that enable me to go always forward. At present I'm in my Vicariate House doing my ministry and soon will be heading for one of my diocesan parishes. May our Mother of Betharram, St. Michael & St. Miriam intercede for us.

Dn Xavier Vipin Joseph scj

I too came to know about the family of Betharram through my vocation promoter Rev. Fr. Paul Manavalan, a diocesan priest who gave me the inspirational spirituality and life of St Michael Garicoits. One of the striking moments in my life, is the time I spent in the house of our founder at Ibarre where he underwent the God experiences in different stages of his life in the form of poverty, life struggles and the strong determination that made him to say "forward always forward". This motivated me to be a spiritual cammando in the family of Betharram. I carry out his motivational insight in my life and today I do my mission at Xavier Care Home in Bangalore as an In-charge and help our fathers in their pastoral ministry.

I pray that I may be even more inspired as a zealous missionary through the intercession of St. Michael and St. Mariam of Jesus crucified.

Dn Edwin José scj

*The years in the formation in our religious family is a period of blessing to live and share the spirituality of our congregation and to share the charism in mission. This has helped me to develop a habit of 'discerning love' which leads me to true spiritual freedom. In mirroring my life with that of St. Michael I affirm myself that I am most truly free only when I have surrendered my will to the One I love. And this surrender is only possible when I know that I am totally accepted just as I am which I experienced on the day of my final profession. I am grateful to the Lord for the gift of my formators, spiritual guides and superiors who helped me to understand that the discerning person must be a praying person, one who takes God seriously and is genuinely concerned with God's involvement in his life.*