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A word from the superior general

Going out by “going... inward”,
to share what comes from the soul

Dear Betharramites,

We all know that St. Michael Garicoits wanted us to be not only men of prayer but “prayer itself”. How much joy it causes me to see in my visits that, in the ordinary life of the religious communities we make space to cultivate the love that unites us to a God melted in charity! In his Asian, African, European or American face we rediscover ourselves as children of the same Father. Our family still enjoys the witness of a prayerful life, which strongly marked the lives of many of our brothers, even if this fact often attracted little attention...

It is not the same with the faithful laity: they look at us attentively “under the microscope”. They sense internally when a consecrated person feeds on daily prayer and when he does not. Out of politeness they rarely express their disappointment. But they would long to have pastors who not only proclaimed, but who lived with passion the values of the Kingdom. This longing

doesn't hit the public eye, since in a media driven society what doesn't appear on Facebook doesn't exist! And so we continue ... "prayer-lite", de-sensitised by self-deception, and deceptively consoled ...

Sometimes we accidentally reveal our motives. Consecrated people can be critical of the inner life, viewing it as spiritual escapism, and so they undervalue prayer in ordinary life, when in reality it is indispensable for spiritual life and should be normal and habitual.

In speaking of daily prayer we do not speak of a specific time or of a particular form of prayer. What counts for us is the personal relationship with that living God, an encounter that nourishes faith, hope and love. It is very evident that we are losing what our religious forebears called "the spirit of prayer". This does not depend on time or specific places (which are already well determined in the Rule of life). I think that what we lack is that vital atmosphere in the communities, which is an inexhaustible source of Kingdom-life and that builds daily fidelity to vocation and salts our mission, giving it flavour.

Remember what St Michael Garicoits told us, talking about our relationship with God:

"I know that God does not stop talking to us at the bottom of our souls, to possess them, to enlighten them, to fertilise them, making them shine with the divine life. I also know that, in the privacy of these souls, there is an incessant fermentation, aroused,

sustained by a creative hand, and that demands, as from an infinite distance, from the midst of the darkness of daze and of noises of all kinds, a response, a surrender to the divine pursuit of God..." (DS § 128)

When a relationship with God has been made in ordinary life, the heart is unified, and it does not matter whether or not an explicit time is given to prayer. But, for that reason, for that healthy indifference, we desire much more intensely to be alone with the One we know loves us (St. Teresa). So while this "unification" is being achieved, the dedication of specific times of prayer is the normal pathway in the ordinary life of a religious or a lay person. We already have the advice of our Rule of Life that helps us to discern when, how much and how. However it saddens me to note sometimes, that for a few people this seems to mean nothing.

It is not easy, in the time in which we live, to persevere faithfully in preserving these times and moments of encounter with the Lord. It must be admitted that, in some of our missions, and in certain local Churches where secularism has wreaked havoc, the possibility of praying Mass every day, for example: it is not a reality (and I am not talking about a mechanical sacramentalism here). But if we, consecrated men, have the conviction that life consists in loving rather than in "performing", then the discipline of fidelity to prayer will be internally motivated and it will be easier to try to enrich creative prayer, and truly

celebrate the mass as the Mystery of Life. Our life goes inwards so that we can then go outwards, enlightened, strengthened and transformed by prayer.

The Eucharist, the memorial of our redemption is the HEART of our life of personal and community prayer. We try to celebrate it every day. We prolong this praise of the Father in the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, and incorporate it in the Apostolic Community Project (see Rule of Life 81-83).

In addition, so that our prayer life is fruitful - and not just individualistic or sterile in community - we share the Word, we nourish ourselves with a good book, we practice lectio divina, we confess periodically, we allow ourselves to be accompanied by someone who helps us. We share a six day retreat each year (or do the Ignatian Spiritual Exercise.). How many pathways and all for FREE!

That spirit of prayer consists in journeying to the interior and tuning in to the dynamics, "that are at work throughout my soul" (Saint Ignatius), to grow in the spiritual life, bearing fruit:

- It will give greater quality to human and fraternal relationships in community.

- Create areas of dialogue that facilitate the search for truth from authentic, non-stereotyped attitudes.

- It will make us more sensitive to the beauty and the freedom of this life (marked as it is by practical materialism).

- It will encourage us to have greater solidarity with the poor and excluded, because it will integrate suffering into the life of apostolic prayer of the community (which often has a tendency to become 'refined')

- It will help us to put Love in first place, that secret spring that St Michael invites us to rediscover in our hearts (a counterbalance to power, money or individual independence).

- It will help us be honest about the experience of sin within us, through the shared review of life and the practice of fraternal correction.

- Finally, it will help us to dedicate ourselves more to people than to institutions, opening horizons of hope around a God who promised: "*I will be with you all the days until the end of the world*" (Mt 28.20).

Beloved brothers, I invite you to renew in each community and in each Betharramite house this life of prayer that nourishes our mission. I do it with the words of the Founder in one of his letters to the religious: "*Hopefully... this year, we can, with the grace of God, impose absolute silence all around us and, above all inside ourselves so that without fail the all powerful Word of God will come to us and live in us*" (DS § 128).

In the month of Mary of Betharram a prayerful embrace for all.

Fr. Gustavo SCJ
SUPERIOR GENERAL

Homily on the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

Saint Peter's Basilica, Saturday, 29 June 2019

The Apostles Peter and Paul stand before us as witnesses. They never tired of preaching and journeying as missionaries from the land of Jesus to Rome itself. Here they gave their ultimate witness, offering their lives as martyrs. If we go to the heart of that testimony, we can see them as witnesses to life, witnesses to forgiveness and witnesses to Jesus.

Witnesses to life. Their lives, though, were not neat and linear. [...] We may wonder why the Lord chosen not to give us two witnesses of utter integrity, with clean records and impeccable lives? Why Peter, when there was John? Why Paul, and not Barnabas?

There is a great teaching here: the starting point of the Christian life is not our worthiness; in fact, the Lord was able to accomplish little with those who thought they were good and decent. Whenever we consider ourselves smarter or better than others, that is the beginning of the end. The Lord does not work miracles with those who consider themselves righteous, but with those who know themselves needy. He is not attracted by our goodness; that is not why he loves us. He loves us just as we are; he is looking for people who are not self-sufficient, but ready to open their hearts to him. People who, like Peter and Paul, are transparent before God. [...] Throughout life,



they preserved this humility, to the very end. [...] Both understood that holiness does not consist in exalting but rather in humbling oneself. Holiness is not a contest, but a question of entrusting our own poverty each day to the Lord, who does great things for those who are lowly. What was the secret that made them persevere amid weakness? It was the Lord's forgiveness.

Let us think about them too as witnesses to forgiveness. In their failings, they encountered the powerful mercy of the Lord, who gave them rebirth. In his forgiveness, they encountered irrepressible peace and joy. Thinking back to their failures, they might have experienced feelings of guilt. How many times might Peter have thought back to his denial! How many scruples might Paul have felt at having hurt so many innocent people! Humanly, they had failed. Yet they encountered a love greater than their failures, a forgiveness strong enough to heal even their feelings of guilt. Only when we experience God's forgiveness do we truly experience rebirth. From there we start over, from forgiveness; there we rediscover who we really are: in the confession of our sins.

Witnesses to life and witnesses to forgiveness, Peter and Paul are ultimately witnesses to Jesus. In today's

Gospel, the Lord asks: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The answers evoke figures of the past: "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets". Remarkable people, but all of them dead. Peter instead replies: "You are the Christ" (Mt 16:13-14.16). The Christ, that is, the Messiah. A word that points not to the past, but to the future: the Messiah is the one who is awaited, he is newness, the one who brings God's anointing to the world. Jesus is not the past, but the present and the future. He is not a distant personage to be remembered, but the one to whom Peter can speak intimately: You are the Christ. For those who are his witnesses, Jesus is more than a historical personage; he is a living person: he is newness, not things we have already seen, the newness of the future and not a memory from the past. The witness, then, is not someone who knows the story of Jesus, but someone who has experienced a love story with Jesus. The witness, in the end, proclaims only this: that Jesus is alive and that he is the secret of life. Indeed, Peter, after saying: "You are the Christ", then goes on to say: "the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Witness arises from an encounter with the living Jesus. At the centre of Paul's life too, we find that same word that rises up from Peter's heart: Christ. Paul repeats this name constantly, almost four hundred times in his letters! For him, Christ is not only a model, an example, a point of reference: he is life itself. Paul writes: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). Jesus is Paul's present and his future, so

much so that he considers the past as refuse in comparison to the surpassing knowledge of Christ (cf. Phil 3:7-8).

Brothers and sisters, in the presence of these witnesses, let us ask: "Do I renew daily my own encounter with Jesus?" We may be curious about Jesus, or interested in Church matters or religious news. We may open computer sites and the papers, and talk about holy things. But this is to remain at the level of what are people saying? Jesus does not care about polls, past history or statistics. He is not looking for religion editors, much less "front page" or "statistical" Christians. He is looking for witnesses who say to him each day: "Lord, you are my life".

[...] Let us rediscover who we truly are through a daily relationship with Jesus and through the power of his forgiveness. Just as he asked Peter, Jesus is now asking us: "Who do you say that I am?", "Do you love me?" Let us allow these words to penetrate our hearts and inspire us not to remain content with a minimum, but to aim for the heights, so that we too can become living witnesses to Jesus. [...] •

Betharramite Ordinations to Priesthood



Fr Andrew Manop Kaengkhaio. For my personal experiences in my ordination day. First of all I really thank and grateful to God for calling me to be His little instrument through the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Ordinations to priesthood by the imposition of the hands of Mgr Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, Bishop of the diocese of Chiang Mai, on June 29, 2019

| Stephen Banjerd Chuensuklert-taweekul, a new priest of the Congregation scj in Thailand was ordained on 29 June 2019. I am really happy that God has chosen me to be his disciple closely to him more and more as an instrument to serve the people of God. With love and grateful heart.

For my dream: I hope that God will make a way and provides for me to be a good instrument and I want to be a good priest with joy and happiness in order to send the same happiness to others.

of Betharram.

To become a priest is not easy but to be a good priest is more difficult. As I'm already be a priest in this congregation go forward and grow further more and more as well as I can do.

Being in this family, I want to see our congregation to have more dialogue and concern to each other more and more, so that our congregation will full of joy and happiness, and I really want to give myself totally to the Heart of Jesus because He is my everything, I am nothing.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all of Betharram's members for helping and encouraging me, may the Sacred Heart of Jesus bless us all. Thank you

Ordination to priesthood by the imposition of the hands of Mgr Vincent Landel, bishop emeritus of Rabat. The celebration took place on July 6th, in Benin.

"I look up at your heavens, shaped by your fingers, at the moon and the stars you set firm, what are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him?" (Ps 8, 3-4).

Yes, Lord, on this 6th of July 2019, on the seventy-second anniversary of our Father Saint Michel Garicoïts' and Saint Elisabeth Bichier des Ages' canonization, you made me the grace of Priesthood, and I feel weak and unworthy in front of this great mystery. Yes, Priesthood is a mystery! And as Saint John Chrysostome said : "Priesthood is an honour but also a heavy responsibility which weighs to the height of man's dignity". I would like to put my trust in you, my Betharramite brothers, for this responsibility received on behalf of the Lord, by the imposition of hands and the consecration of my poor hands by His Lordship Vincent Landel.

Saint Michael also gives me the meaning of my mission today : "To become holy, to seek one's personal perfection, such is the common end of religious life. To sanctify others without ceasing to sanctify ourselves, that is our special characteristic." (DS § 347).

May the intercession of our Father Saint Michael and of all the Betharramites help me to keep this secret spring, which is love, and give happiness to the others .



Today, Saint Michael Garicoïts tells us to go forward together: "What do we need on our side to draw down God's blessing on ourselves? A sincere esteem of our vocation and our mission: a true interior and habitual disposition to fulfil the duties of our fine position as true auxiliary priests, according to our rules, and as true instruments of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. With this spirit all good things will come to us: the taste for our state: faithfulness to all the duties of our state, peace and contentment in our state." (DS § 338)

Habib Yelouwassi scj

Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region

Has the presence of Betharram in England, Thailand and India reached a certain degree of cohesiveness in the St Marie de Jésus Crucifié region, in spite of the distance and diversity of cultures?



When I am asked the reason for my presence in England, I explain briefly how our Congregation is organised and how the religious communities which make up our Vicariates which, in turn, make up the Regions, are implanted across the world. When I introduce the Region St Mary of Jesus Crucified, I am always at some point asked what is it that connects India and Thailand to England. What unites these three countries cannot, I think, be explained by reasons of geography but by reasons connected to the history of our religious family, to the values specific to the religious life and our spirituality.

We have been in England since the beginning of the 20th Century; our first missionaries arrived in Thailand at the start of the 1950s; we opened the first formation house in India 25 years ago. These realities came to life at different times and for different reasons as well: in England the religious fathers and brothers came over from France to keep the young Congregation alive when it was under threat by the (French) Combes Law on the separation of Church and State; in Thailand the first missionaries – expelled from China – devoted themselves to evangelising the Karens in the north of the country, hopeful that they would be able to return to China. One of the fruits

of their labours was to create the diocese of Chiang Mai. But it was only in the 1980s that we started to receive and form the first young men who came knocking on the door of our religious family and who today, with three missionaries belonging to the “old guard”, form the Vicariate of Thailand.

In India on the other hand, it started with the opening of a centre for formation in Bangalore. We had been motivated and encouraged to make the move there by religious sisters linked to our Congregation who were already present in India, namely the Servants of Marie d’Anglet (founded by the Blessed Fr. Louis Edouard Cestac, a classmate of Saint Michael Garicoïts) and the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel (founded by Sister Veronique de la Passion who became a Carmelite and the Novice Mistress of the novice Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified).

Our presence in England and Thailand is really down to the “forced exits” from France and China respectively. The move towards India occurred quite naturally, sparked by the desire to share our charism. However, in these three realities, Providence has always been present, taking unexpected twists and turns, but obeying a plan clear in the mind of God.

To understand this plan, not always easily to decipher, it is I think important to keep in mind this diversity of origins which today come together to make a portrait of a Region as a whole. A portrait painted in shadows and light, a work in

progress to which the Region's diverse strengths are making a contribution.

How does being a missionary in countries where Christians are in the minority affect our life style as religious?

In Thailand, there are around 300,000 Catholics representing 0.46% of the total population. In India, Christianity is the third most practiced religion (after Hinduism and Islam) and Christians account for 2.30% of the total population. Catholics make up about 17 million or 1.5% of the population. In the U.K., figures indicate that there are 5 million Catholics out of 59 million inhabitants (8.5%).

Persecution of Christians in India is, sadly, very much on the agenda. The media inform us of the waves of violence which regularly affect them. The situation in Thailand is far calmer but that doesn't mean the mission is any the easier.

The first form of witness which our religious fathers and brothers can give is without doubt that of living a life faithful to their vocation as Betharramites. The rule of life invites them to seek out what is already good and present in the hearts and minds of man, as well as in the cultures of other peoples (cf. RdV 129). This very broad affirmation then finds specific applications depending on the context: parishes in the South of India; schools and parishes in the North-East where contact with Muslims and some tribal populations is more marked, and where our religious fathers and brothers are called to sow the seed in the expectation that others will later reap the fruits. In this context, the mission demands yet more generosity, greater patience and vision

for the long term.

In Thailand, the religious fathers and brothers carry out their mission in the midst of established Christian communities, fruits of the work carried out by our first missionaries. They are called to keep alive and deepen the faith of these populations, especially where the young are concerned.

What are the elements of vitality and strong points in the Region?

One of the strong points is certainly the missionary impetus which has been manifest in all three Vicariates from the beginning and which has grown, albeit along different paths, to respond to the needs specific to each culture and each moment in history.

The General Chapter in Paraguay (2017) certainly contributed to re-energising this impetus, by formulating a project for the Congregation for the next six years, based on the following themes: go out and drink from the same wellspring, go out and share, go out (in community) to meet life in all its multiple and diverse neighbourhoods, go out and share the joy.

After accompanying the Superior General on his recent visits to the three Vicariates (December 2018 to March 2019), I can see how much effort the Vicariate Councils and communities are making to achieve this project, taking as foundation for reflection and discussion the report addressed by Fr. Gustavo to each Vicariate on the conclusion of his visits, and by regularly meditating at Community meetings on his editorial published in the NEF.

Another strong feature of this portrait of the Region is assuredly the regional novitiate based in India. The difficulties in obtaining visas for novices coming from Thailand seem to increase every year but up to now, we've managed to overcome this hurdle. However, this is an area of great concern which we are going to have to tackle in the very near future.

When talking with scholastics, religious fathers and brothers in India and Thailand, I often hear them recalling and remembering the men they were friends with during their novitiate; and we can see that some have continued to stay in touch. The present novice master is Indian but in the past, we have also had a Thai master. This has gone a long way to promoting the sense of family and of developing a more "regional" picture of our two Vicariates in Asia.

In this sharing between peoples which leads to reciprocal enrichment, England also plays a significant part: several Indian and Thai fathers and brothers have spent brief periods in this

Vicariate to provide help and support in ministry and to perfect their English. Three Indian scholastics did their theology in England and today, with another Indian father, they are fully integrated into the Vicariate and one has been appointed Vicar General of the Region. In a short while, a priest from Thailand will also be coming to join a community in the English Vicariate.

A final strong point in the Region is the readiness of the English Vicariate to make regular economic resources available to the Indian Vicariate for the formation of young people and for carrying out various different missionary projects particularly in the North-East.

Lay people fulfil an important role, even though that is to a certain extent different depending on the Vicariates, by working together on the mission with the religious fathers and brothers. They stand alongside the priests and brothers in parishes, they help young priests and brothers or those in formation to learn or perfect a foreign language, they offer their skills and support to the fathers and brothers engaged in social matters. They have played an essential role when it has been a question of raising funds for building the formation house in India.

In addition, in every Vicariate there are also efforts to keep alive or create a group of lay people who are interested and ready to deepen their knowledge of our spirituality by regular meetings and encounters.



A Region full of vitality

How does the spirituality of the “Flying Camp” show itself in the Region?

During the visits I have made over my first year as Regional Superior, I have personally met all the religious fathers and brothers and the bishops of the dioceses in which we are present and in which we carry out our mission.

During these visits, I have been able to ascertain that after the General Chapter, there has been a sound response from the communities to undertake a community and apostolic project: agreed, there is still a lot of road ahead, but I believe we are going in the right direction.

At my meetings with the bishops of the dioceses in which we are carrying out our mission, every one of them has emphasised the great devotion with which our religious fathers and brothers do their work in the mission entrusted to the Congregation by the diocese: chaplaincy work, schools, parishes... A devotion which where necessary means learning a new language, or having the ability to work together with religious sisters and lay people, or by the willingness to come out of one's "comfort zone" and adapt to living in what can sometimes be difficult circumstances.

In one Vicariate where we are doing parish work, the bishop has asked us to be open also to work in other areas of apostleship which demand the flexibility and missionary style specific to religious fathers and brothers.

The priests and brothers of the Region are living proof of this "flying camp" spirituality, willingly offering their readiness to carry out their mission in another Vicariate and in another Region. At

present there are 9 religious fathers and brothers from the Indian Vicariate and 1 from the Vicariate of Thailand who are carrying out their mission in other parts of the world.

However it is only fair to also recall the readiness of the English Vicariate in the recent past when two English brothers went off to spend long periods in India.

You mentioned the Community Apostolic Project... what “hazards” will that help us avoid?

Because of the distance separating some residences which form a single community, the community and apostolic project is vital to avoid community life becoming impoverished and to be apprised of how the actual conditions in which the community labours to achieve its mission change over time, whereas the project is updated annually.

In addition, this project keeps the fathers and brothers' attention focussed on the priorities they intend to follow and thus is an effective tool against spreading one's troops too thinly on the ground!

With sixty-odd young men admitted into the formation houses in the Region, is the initial formation a significant challenge?

It is for this very reason that, prompted by our Superior General, the Vicariates and particularly those who receive young men for formation, give the right measure of importance to the formation of the formators... This awareness was translated into reality at the meeting of the Region's formators held in Chiang Mai last March. This meeting was organised by the General Councillor for Formation and the Superior General was present.

In Thailand, there are seven scholastics, one first-year novice (in India), eight postulants (two of whom are young Vietnamese who will shortly be starting their novitiate in India) and forty other young men at different stages in formation.

In India, there are six scholastics, ten postulants (three of whom are Vietnamese) and six pre-postulants. The Indian Vicariate has no novices this year.

Are there any young religious who are currently training to be formators?

At the moment, in India one religious is attending the formators course.

Formation is a recurring topic at Regional Council meetings and some young priests have been asked if they would make themselves available for this service.

Taking account of the average age of the Betharramite fathers and brothers (36 in India and 43 in Thailand), guidance and support and continuing formation are doubtless a major concern for the Regional Superior (RdV art 237 d). Over your first year in office, what needs have you come across?

I would start by the feeling of belonging to the Congregation, which translates initially into the fact of keeping oneself informed about what is happening in the other Betharramite communities dispersed throughout the world and being active in spreading news via our Website to enable all our religious family to be part of the life of the Vicariates.

On a deeper level, I am thinking of the work to keep the values of religious life alive (community life, community prayer, readiness to engage in activities

specific to the Congregation), values which sometimes seem to be of secondary importance compared to projects at local Church level. On this point, seeking the right balance must be a continuing concern, especially where the superiors in the community are concerned. On this point, referring to the guidelines and decisions of the General Chapter is crucial.

In the two Vicariates where young priests and brothers are the most numerous, I would stress the need for much greater rigour, accuracy and fairness in how the communities and, accordingly, each father and brother, present the accounts. Progress has been made in this area by the Vicariates, thanks in particular to the attentiveness of their vicars and bursars.

Almost thirty years after the first profession in India of the late Fr. Xavier Ponthokkan scj (in 1990), what amazing offshoots have prospered in the East!...

From Betharram "on high", St Michael Garicoits is contemplating the fruits which his intuition and charism have produced across the Channel, "over the seas and far away"... That's why every time I fly out of England to go East to visit our brethren in Thailand and India, I always break my journey (in my heart) at Betharram sanctuary to seek counsel from our founder on how his spirit can be deepened, cherished and kept alive in this Region.

Enrico Frigerio scj
Regional Superior

350 Years of the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam (Mission of Siam)

On the 16th of May 2019 His Eminence Cardinal Fernando Filoni, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, arrived in Thailand for a pastoral visit and to officially open the celebrations for the 350th Anniversary of the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam (Mission of Siam), which is a huge milestone for the Catholic Church in Thailand. The cardinal's pastoral visit in Thailand was comprised of several events and visits to different places of significant interest. The first leg of his official visit was held in the Archdiocese of Bangkok and the second part was a trip to the Diocese of Chiang Mai. The cardinal visited two important places for the missions in the Chiang Mai Diocese – the Sacred Heart Cathedral in the City of Chiang Mai and the Mae Pon Village in the Chom Thong District.

It was on the 4th of June 1669 when the territory of Siam (old name of Thailand) was officially approved as the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam and, 350 years after, the Catholic Church in Thailand is now composed of 2 archdioceses and 9 suffragan dioceses.

The characteristics of the path of evangelization in Thailand from its origins

The work of evangelization started in Ayutthaya, a province near Bangkok in the central region of Thailand, and the Catholic faith has now spread to different



parts of the country. However, it would not be possible to write here in a short span of time and in very few pages an account of the historical events that happened. From my perspective here are a few characteristics of the path of evangelization in Thailand

Designating foreign missionaries in the task of evangelization

In the early years of the Church, the missionaries in the land of Siam were foreigners. The newly established Vicariate of Siam was entrusted to the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris (M.E.P.) or Foreign Missions of Paris. The M.E.P. missionaries who were all French dedicated themselves to studying the Thai language and culture and with great effort they tried to understand the customs and traditions of the Thai people. In 1796, they wrote the Catechism and Catholic prayers in the Thai language.

Establishing Catholic schools

Catholic schools were built to provide education and formation to children and young people. This year we are celebrating the 354 years of the Catholic education in Thailand. At present, there are 347 Catholic schools in the 11 dioceses spread all over Thailand. In 2018 there were 514,182 students from

kindergarten to secondary school. 95% of these students are Buddhists. Even up to this day, parents still continue to send their children to Catholic schools primarily due to the high quality of education and good moral formation received by the students. Through the Catholic schools the Church has the opportunity to teach the students the Christian values that are treasured by the Catholic faith.

Performing charitable works

The most effective means of evangelization is still performing charitable works by taking care of the poor, the sick and the dying, visiting parishioners and village people and providing for their material needs when necessary. These activities serve as a good witness that attracts people to the faith. Through these social actions personal relationships with the Thai people are established and the gap is reduced between Catholics and

non-Catholics, foreigners and locals, the rich and the poor.

Everyone is encouraged to participate in activities towards the improvement of the society and assist the poor and the needy in the community while respectfully offering Christian values and experiences through these endeavors.

In particular, what was the path of evangelization in the Diocese of Chiang Mai?

In the Diocese of Chiang Mai the path of evangelization is almost similar to what the entire Church in Thailand has been doing except that in the Diocese there is a strong presence of tribal populations, which spells the great difference especially in our work of propagating the faith.

Establishment of Catholic Schools

In 1931, 2 priests travelled to Chiang Mai to start their missionary work. They bought a piece of land, built a church and a parochial school. In 1932 three Catholic schools were built close to each other – Regina Coeli College, Montfort College and Sacred Heart College.

Pastoral Care of the Tribal People and Establishment of Youth Centers/Hostels

In 1952 the priests



of the Sacred Heart Congregation of Betharram arrived to assist in the pastoral ministry in the Chiang Mai Mission. They started to express great interest in the pastoral care of the Pgaz K'Nyau (Karen) tribe in the Mae Pon Village, Chom Thong District as well as in the Mae Hong Son Province.

They soon established a youth center for the Pgaz K'Nyau (Karen) tribe which is composed of dormitories that accommodate children from poor families. The children stay in the church premises and study in a nearby public school. The Pgaz K'Nyau (Karen) Mae Pon sisters help take care of the children and teach catechism, the Thai language, the Pgaz K'Nyau (Karen) tribal language and even singing lessons.

At present, the Chiang Mai Diocese is composed of 39 parishes and it runs 35 youth hostels that accommodate almost 1,900 children.

In almost all parish churches, free lodging is provided to the local people who come to downtown areas for medical visits. Priests and sisters are ready to welcome them and attend to their needs.

Community Rice Banks

With the exception of the City of Chiang Mai, which thrives on tourism as the main source of income, the local people in all provinces inside the territory of the Chiang Mai Diocese depend on agriculture for their subsistence. Organizing community rice bank projects and the setting-up and maintenance of rice banks are an on-going initiative among more than 300 farming communities.

Through this initiative villages are able to take care of their own resources, assure themselves of rice to eat especially during times of need, help other needy members of their community and assist other farming communities through the use of safe and environment-friendly local farming methods. Villages from the Provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son and Lamphun participate in this initiative. Non-Catholic members of the villages also participate as some Catholic communities are adjacent to or live close by their Buddhist brothers and sisters and people of other Christian denominations.

Catechetical Camps

Various pastoral activities are held especially in summer when most of the children and young people are free from school. Youth catechetical camps, seminars for Catholic village leaders, family life promotion programs, catechism for adult catechumens, adult catechetical camps and other programs are organized. Every year there are about 40-55 camps/seminars in 30 parishes with 4,000-5,000 participants, catechists and volunteers. About 2,500-3,000 are children, an estimate of 1,000 are young people and around 200 are adults who participate in the camps. The children and young people are encouraged to participate in these catechetical camps in order to make up for the lack of Christian formation during the year as they study in non-Catholic schools. 600-750 catechists and volunteers assist in these camps held in various places.

Over the last 3 years, among the participants 290-430 receive the Sacrament of Baptism, 90-160 make their First Confession, 300-530 receive their First Holy Communion and 190-400 receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

There are numerous challenges that the Church of Thailand must face in continuing the work of evangelization in the coming years.

Increasing demand in the pastoral ministry to young people

The Diocese is blessed to have a big youth population however pastoral care involving the youth has become more complex and demanding. The young people need to pursue educational opportunities so many of them move to the cities and downtown areas in order to continue with senior high school and study in the university. Catholic youth centers are located in these areas and are willing to accommodate the youth. However these young people feel strongly the need to exercise their freedom so Catholic centers no longer seem attractive to them. They are now more attached to the use of mobile phones and obsessed with social media and many no longer appreciate the value of hard work. Numerous young people enter the seminaries and convents but as soon as they finish their senior high school they leave and pursue other opportunities. Despite this reality, many young people of the Pgaz K'Nyau (Karen) tribe still enter the seminaries and convents and they are present in almost all congregations.

Continuous growth in the number of catechumens and their continued formation

There are a remarkable number of catechumens and enquirers in the Chiang Mai Diocese. In 2014 alone the number of catechumens reached 15,000 while the total Catholic population reached 71,000. This prompted the proposal to divide the Diocese of Chiang Mai into 2 smaller dioceses. On the 25th of April 2018, the Holy Father Pope Francis officially announced the creation of the Diocese of Chiang Rai and appointed as its first bishop Msgr. Joseph Vuthilert Haelom.

The increasing number of catechumens and the need for the pastoral care at the grass-root level pushed me to focus on the continuous formation of catechists for the village people and encourage the youth and the Mae Pon sisters to attend a 2-year formation course for catechists in the Diocesan Catechetical Center and study in a 4-year Bachelor's Degree program at the Lux Mundi College. Through these studies they would be equipped with the know-how, techniques and skills in order to teach and form the large number of catechumens in the villages and children in youth centers.

Need for further training and formation on the care for the environment

The people in the villages need to be more informed about the harmful effects of chemical pesticides in farming, encouraged to stop from using

these chemicals and presented with alternative sustainable farming methods in order to boost harvest without endangering the environment and the local people's health.

The theme on ecology and preserving the environment, especially Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, should be a vital part in seminars and trainings conducted in villages and different communities. Since the people are directly in contact with nature in

this mountainous region of Thailand and their lives depend mostly on what the soil, water and the other elements of nature would provide them, it is less complicated to discuss about nature and environment and implement concrete steps in resolving various environmental problems such as organic farming, self-sufficiency economy.

*Mgr Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana
Bishop of the diocese of Chiang Mai*

Celebrating in Maepon

The Ethnic Educational Center known as Maepon Center is situated in an enchanting position, at the mouth of a valley that enters deeply into the tallest mountains of Northern Thailand called Inthanon Mountain. Fr. Séguinotte and Fr. Fognini started this Centre, since 1955, for the formation of the young Karen coming from the mountain. The Centre becomes a school for primary education, professional training school such as typical Karen weaving, dress-making, agriculture, Christian initiation and school of formation for catechists. The Centre has become a hostel, a temporary home for so many young people, boys and girls of the mountain since the beginning. Children and youth found an ideal and practical place for their education, professional training and even fertile soil for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

One of the missionaries of the beginnings wrote: "In continuity with the missionary work of the Fathers of the M.E.P. in Burma, we operate on the mountains of Thailand among the same populations. The missionary, accompanied by the catechists, visits small communities scattered on the mountains, making week long trips on foot. The catechists are very important because we want that the missionary work among the Karen be done by the Karen themselves.

Some small communities are founded. A small chapel in bamboo is the place of meeting for the prayer and for the community. The villagers choose a person responsible of the community and, where possible, a small school is started where the children can develop their spirit, their mind and their heart."

The creation of the school at the Center of Maepon, where young boys and girls of all the districts of the mountain are welcomed, has been highly beneficial. The young people learn to read, to write, they participate in the liturgical life, and they learn to know each other and to live in community. The

young people who spent a certain time at Maepon, returning in their villages, they become little teachers for other young people and they become the animators of the community.”

The elementary school of the beginnings continues its activity and becomes a branch of a school of the lowland.

Since the beginning the Center of Maepon has been the crib of the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate Conception founded by Mons. Lucien Lacoste s.c.j. The Congregation have grown steadily and 2019 numbers about fifty seven nuns, who collaborate with local churches in various communities and dioceses. At present Fr. David Pitak Bitu is Parish Priest assisted by Fr. John Bosco Sommai and Br. James Thanit, a scholastic of the Congregation.

The visit of Cardinal Filoni, representative of Pope Francis, has been a great event for Maepon and many people wanted to be present. His Eminence had the opportunity to see and touch the fruit of the Faith sown by the missionaries of Betharram.

The crowd that invaded Maepon has been a demonstration of belonging to the universal church and, being the Cardinal the messenger of the Pope, means that Jesus himself came to visit them to strengthen them and encourage them to live the faith in this present time and to transmit this same faith to the next generation.

The cardinal took the cue from the Gospel – If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him (Jn 14,23) – to encourage the faithful who came for this special occasion to live a Christian life: “As Christians we have a mission to fulfill, that is to make others to know about Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. With our way of living we become witnesses of the Faith growing in us”.

Then he invited to incarnate their Faith into practice in their daily life: “May Jesus enter actively into your family. Always pray to Jesus. The family that use to pray together live together too. Jesus will give His mother to be their mother too. Dear brothers and sisters, commend your family under the guidance and protection of the Mother”.

If we could say with a football team supporters, we would say: “You never walk alone”. This is a strong message that can be extracted from the Maepon event. Going back home the people will have a solid feeling that together they are strong.

As Betharramite, we are grateful to God for being the part of this history of 350 years of the evangelization in Thailand, 68 years of our presence to serve God in this land and to have contributed to the creation of the local church, 60 years of the Diocese of Chiang Mai.

John Chan Kunu scj, Regional Vicar



The Superior General is going to resume *the canonical visits to the Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar* from 12 August until the end of October. He will start with the visit to the communities of Brazil.

Dates for the upcoming scheduled General Council meetings:

- ☼ *6-7 August in Rome*
- ☼ *Plenary General Council in September in Adrogué* (during the Council of the Congregation from September 18 to 24)
- ☼ *30-31 October*
- ☼ *4-5 december*

Reminder : The **Regional Secretaries** are invited to communicate to the General Secretary the dates of the next Regional Council meetings in order to adjust, if necessary and where possible, the above mentioned schedule.



..... *In
memoriam*

† Sunday, June 16, in Buenos Aires (Argentina), *the mother of late Fr. Enrique Miranda scj* passed away. We pray for the family and give thanks for her generous life.

† On the evening of June 28, *Mrs Tilde Radaelli*, sister of Fr Francesco Radaelli SCJ, Superior General Emeritus, of the Albiate (Italy) community, died. In union of prayers with our brother and his family.

† *Mr André Appesseche*, brother-in-law of Fr. Joseph Ruspil SCJ (of the community of Saint-Palais) and Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil SCJ (of the community of Pibrac), died on 9 July 2019 in his 84th year. In hope, let us join in prayer with the family to whom we express our fraternal sympathy.

The Foundation of the Betharramite Community of Bethlehem

by Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Father Etchécopar maintained the charism in the communities and missions founded by St. Michael Garicoïts. Also, to satisfy the Bishop, and having been elected Superior General, he accepted in 1874 that a community should lead the Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague College in Bayonne.



ship bound her to Miss Berthe Dartigaux, who always supported her financially in her projects. Both worked together so that there was a community of Bétharramites beside Carmel, where the chaplain could live.

The founding of the community of Bethlehem was difficult and surprising. In August 1875, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was part of the community that was en route to Bethlehem. She is accompanied by Miss Berthe Dartigaux, Fr. Estrate and Abbot Bordachar, the latter two having been in Rome to present the Constitutions of Bétharram a few months before. In Bethlehem, the Carmelite community moved to a temporary house. Miss Dartigaux acquired land on the hill of David and soon after the construction of Carmel began. In December 1876, Sister Mary urged Fr. Etchécopar to send one of his religious to ensure the chaplaincy of Carmel. Father Etchécopar sent Father Chirou.

Although she was a religious nun of the white veil¹, Sister Mary had a lot of influence on the community because of her extraordinary spiritual experiences. A great friend-

Sister Mary contacted the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Mgr. Bracco, both orally and in writing, to convince him of the importance of the presence of such a community near Carmel in Bethlehem. The Patriarch "promises, temporizes, eludes. Finally, in his response dated 27 November 1877, he declares that the admission to the Holy Land of future chaplains... [requires] the direct and formal order of the Holy See."²

The "little woman" was to become a diplomat. In addition to praying and fasting with the whole community of Carmel for this purpose, she sent a letter to Fr. Etchécopar: "I wrote to Father Bianchi... I wrote to Cardinal Franchi too; I recommended Bétharram's purpose in Bethlehem to him." She also turned to the prefect for the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Simeoni, who believing that he was dealing with the prioress, responded on 6 April 1878, that the foundation

2) All quotations are taken from the biography written by Pierre Fernesolle, The Most Reverend Father Auguste Etchécopar.

1) And not a superior (Editor's note)

of this community of Bétharramites "presents many serious difficulties" and that it seemed preferable to "abandon the project".

«The little woman» wrote to Leo XIII on 16 April 1878, who sent his correspondence to Propaganda Fide. The prefect, Mgr. Simeoni, said that the project must be definitively abandoned. But when this news reached the Carmel of Bethlehem, Mariam had been dead since 26 August 1878.

Before leaving this world, Mariam confided in Miss Berthe Dartigaux: «He is slowing me down,» she said to her in July, «that permission is coming! But let me tell you that, in order for you to succeed, I believe you need to go to Rome yourself, to throw yourself at the feet of the Holy Father Leo XIII, ask him for this grace, just as has already been said. I believe you will succeed if you do." And on the 23rd of July: "My God, go quickly to Rome yourself, if you haven't already left yet; I am sure you will have it (permission) sooner; no one speaks their own cause better than the actual person concerned." On 4 August 1878, a few days before dying, she was still making enquiries with Fr. Chirou, to find out what was going on: «As it is done in heaven; so will it be on earth.»

In December, Miss Dartigaux left for Rome. Thanks to the high protection of Cardinal Chigi, who she met in Paris, she obtained a private audi-

ence with the Pope. She spoke to the holy father of Sister Mary and her extraordinary spiritual gifts: the way in which Sister Mary had known through a revelation of the death of Pius IX and his election after him of Leo XIII. She asked him to grant her a grace on behalf of Mariam: a Bétharramite community for those who would be the chaplains of the Carmel of Bethlehem.

The Pope was impressed, he recognized the divine intervention and told Miss Berthe to send him the request in writing through Propaganda Fide. Berthe let him know that they did not want to hear about it. The Pope replied that this did not matter and that they should do as he told them. Propaganda Fide rejected the requested foundation, a decision which the secretary of the said Congregation communicated to Berthe, warning her further that they would bring this resolution to the Pope on Sunday 14th December and that they would return on Monday the 15th. Berthe went to Propaganda Fide at 6am that day. The secretary, on seeing her, said to her, "Mademoiselle, you have conquered all along the line. When I arrived at the Vatican last night, the Holy Father said to me: Are you coming with Miss Dartigaux?... The Pope immediately said: Are you bringing me one of her letters? Very Holy Father, I said to him, this lady has indeed written to you through Propaganda to ask for a foundation of the Bétharram Fathers... - How did

the Sacred Congregation answer? - It refused unanimously. - Well, I command that this foundation be made. This lady is taking care of all the costs, we do not have the right to oppose this work. Moreover, Palestine and Syria are a field vast enough for several workers at the same time: You understand, Mademoiselle, added the Secretary, that Propaganda can no longer resist! I am ordered to give you the edict concerning this foundation. On Saturday 21 December, Miss Dartigaux received the precious document."

Fr. Etchécopar was aware of the steps taken by Sister Mary and Miss Dartigaux. For his part, he brought together the General Council to decide on the foundation of Bethlehem. On 25 December he specified in a circular: "*Bétharram in Bethlehem on the express order of the Holy Father!*" In this letter, he recommended discretion because there was the question of preserving the relations with the Patriarch, Propaganda Fide and the Franciscans, who had opposed the project...

On 12 May 1879, Fathers Estrate and Abbadie and Brother Hilaire left to join Father Chirou to found the community of Bethlehem. Fr. Chirou was named superior of this founding community at the Council on 15 February, to which Father Planche also belonged and who was to follow the work on our house. A big celebration took place in Bétharram to salute their departure.

The land and the house of the community of Bethlehem were a gift from Miss Berthe to Bétharram. Mariam said that the house must be spacious because, she said, "*they will come in large numbers from Bétharram*". And this was the case. In early 1890, the Council made a decision: on 6 December 1890, Fr. Etchécopar embarked for the Holy Land with Father Bergez and two scholars. Thus, we benefited from a positive backlash against the law of Jules Ferry, who also threatened Catholic education in France and imposed military service on candidates for the priesthood: According to Article 50, the young religious who, before the age of 19, left for the countries of French missions and spent ten years there, would be exempted from military service (see Fernessole). From then on, all the scholars of the Congregation received the same formation. For the school year 1910-1911, only theologians remained in Bethlehem, and the philosophers went to Nazareth. Due to the insecurity caused by the Second World War, the scholars returned to France in 1948 to *Bel Sito*, a house located in Floirac, in the south-eastern suburbs of Bordeaux.

A file containing the 14 documents that underpin the steps of the founding of the Bétharramite community of Bethlehem is available in the archives of the General House in Rome. •

My dear friend,

Hand on my heart let me speak with you... I always learn with pleasure of your news; the more you grow in wisdom, the better you will be able to employ yourself in forming others in holiness and help them grow. I will tell you with all my heart: continue, persevere and seek first God and the law of charity that he delights to write in our souls...

M 792

Missionary youth



Share with a smile the joie de vivre.
Walk with joy.
Dare to commit yourself with others to follow Christ,
In the footsteps of Saint Michael Garicoits, and say:
*“Oh! If our whole being, body and soul,
had only one movement, one generous impulse
to place ourselves under the guidance of the Spirit of Love,
saying without ceasing: Here I am: Ecce Venio!”* (DS § 129)



Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

Generalate House
via Angelo Brunetti, 27
00186 Rome (Italy)
Telephone +39 06 320 70 96
Fax +39 06 36 00 03 09
Email nef@betharram.it

www.betharram.net