



"Come, Lord Jesus, we need you! Draw close to us. You are the light. Rouse us from the slumber of mediocrity; awaken us from the darkness of indifference. Come, Lord Jesus, take our distracted hearts and make them watchful. Awaken within us the desire to pray and the need to love."

(Pope Francis)

A Happy Path of Advent and Merry Christmas to all !



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A word from the superior general

Let us go out one more time!...
by paths unknown, but without losing joy!

"Where there are religious there is joy."
(Pope Francis)

Dear Betharramites,

The General Chapter of 2017 inspired us to choose the theme to be proposed to our communities each year, illuminated as always by the image of Mary exulting with joy on visiting her cousin Elizabeth.

Of course 2020 will probably be more remembered for "lock down", alcoholic gel, facemask and social distancing! We have also witnessed the recovery of some of our brethren plus the departure of some others to the Betharram of Heaven. We saw the confinement, the quarantine and the heroic gestures of those who risked their lives to heal and care for the lonely, sick and helpless.

This was the year in which we had proposed to "Go out, as community, to meet life and its multiple peripheries", and we did it with great creativity, a pastoral service that didn't pause for long despite the forced "slowdown" that the global emergency situation imposed on us. I take this opportunity to thank you

for all the efforts made by you and so many laity in our works.

We have reason to thank God because despite all these tests and contradictions, our daily 'yes' as Betharramites to serve with joy, made sense. Passionate for Christ, who asked us to give our lives, we experienced that strange joy of being thoroughly exhausted, while satisfied with meagre rewards, with a smile and a song in the midst of difficulties.

This Christian joy is in a certain sense contrary to that of the world, because it comes from another source and uses different criteria, and travels along unknown paths and creates new sensations. And yet it is a true and fully human joy. It tastes of happiness.

With the members of the Council of the Congregation we decided to propose this theme: "We go out to share joy." It is the title of the fourth part of the Chapter Acts and will be our motto for the year 2021. It is not about joy in itself, as an attitude or as a virtue, but rather joy as the fruit of our witness to our vocation, a Gift of God and a task that, despite all our limits, produces joy, happiness.

That is the characteristic that the Holy Founder wanted for his family: to be "always happy" (*toujours content*), ever and always despite all the trials we have to live. St. Michael wanted us not to lose that inner condition, which is more than a state of mind. For him it was the fruit of an intimate, frequent and transforming dialogue with the God of Love.

He contemplated this in the Heart of Jesus, the Son who says to his Father: *I am here to do Your will*, and is ready to obey until death and death on the Cross; and in the exultation of the Virgin Mary, the chosen missionary.

She, greeting her cousin, enthuses Elizabeth with joy who in her turn rejoices when she sees her. It is the scene that reproduces a tender, very maternal encounter, at great depth. A physical visceral joy, such that Life moved in the womb of a mother before the arrival of the Saviour.

These icons can be an inspiring first image for a year about to begin. Will someone tell me: is this really a year to celebrate? ... Why not?

The saints have known how to be strong, positive and even optimistic in the most difficult moments. We simply move forward, we trust, we do not lower our shoulders like those who have no hope. Every Betharramite knows that *"one never has to hope more than when all seems lost"* (SMG). *"The congregation is a greater miracle than the resurrection of the dead"*, another fellow traveller told us (Ven. Fr. Auguste Etchecopar). And a pilgrim once prophesied to us: *"Go to Rome now because if you wait it will be too late ..."* (St Mary of Jesus Crucified). A fine sense of discernment will help us discover the signs of God in these difficult times. But we have to be faithful, transparent, and reflect the Light that is in us.

True joy is always received from God. It is not tied to lucky breaks. Our

is, loving, serving and helping people grow in humanity and in faith. When I was called to exercise my priestly ministry in the colleges, I was very disappointed. I didn't expect it and didn't feel prepared enough. I tried to do the best I could. An experience from that time struck me: praying with the little ones, the kindergarten children. The tenderness of the children, their immense capacity to sense the presence of God, the absence of reason and the presence of the heart in them were particularly touching. I understood through them what Saint Michael said and repeated, namely that, in the depths of the heart, there is an incessant fermentation of the divine.

Now I am back again in a parish, that of Beltrán, a small town located about 20 km from the capital of the

province, Santiago del Estero. With two other brothers, we form what is called a missionary community. The absence of a priest in this area for many years has extinguished the exercise of faith and the space filled with evangelical churches. It is for us to rekindle enthusiasm for the Lord through dialogue with all people of good will.

This year it has been difficult to be close to people. I was not afraid to organize meetings with people. Only God knows what has happened in people's hearts. I thank the Lord for allowing me to sow some seeds of his Word and to help those in need. I believe He's been there every moment in my life. I only hope I responded with love and tenderness to what He asked of me. ●●●





heart of Saint Michael. Like Jesus who became man to save a disorderly and violent world, Saint Michael behaved in front of these young people by not giving himself importance, but by showing himself to be simple, available, and kind. He welcomed them to do them good. He understood them; he gave them back the dignity that the world had denied them. He gathered them together to instruct them in religion. They all saw him as a father. If you are born poor and have suffered deprivation, you understand those who live in need, and discover the power of solitude which subjects the poor.

I too come from a poor family. As a child, I experienced working in the fields. This is perhaps something that brings me the closer to the saint. In our Betharramite family, making an effort and being available to serve our brothers and the Church is an essential characteristic, eternally present in all the religious with whom I have lived; a chain whose first link

was our founder and which continues over time. As a religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I have tried to live by working to build good relationships with my neighbour. I have devoted myself with love to preaching the gospel and preparing engaged couples for marriage, parents for the baptism of their children, and children for First Communion. The Lord has given me the grace to initiate and animate small groups of newlyweds. It was a strong desire, because I knew that marriage problems can start after a few months of living together, and it's when a plant starts to grow that you have to help it.

25 years in Uruguay, then Santiago del Estero in Argentina. In the pastoral ministry, Santiago was the most beautiful period of my life. Fr. Francisco Daleoso SCJ, with Fr. Eleuterio Cabero, who preceded me in the parish, had grouped it into 8 communities. Elsewhere, I have found myself leading small groups, leading ... that

vocation and mission in the Church are truer when, after the call, they are purified by discernment and the dedication of our own life. In fact, the religious vocation can be tied to things that the world despises, such as choosing the "lowest seat at the banquet"; ... "leaving father, mother and material goods"; ... "selling everything and give it to the poor"; ... "leaving your own land and making a pilgrimage through life towards the land that the Lord will give us" ... And it is good that it be so. Normally no one encourages us to do that. They seem like options that cause sadness ... Only the Lord Jesus Christ has given us the answer because it is He who looks to the heart, and tells us: *"Follow me!"*

By living the experience of this crazy love, we religious are driven to be His disciples, to change and consecrate ourselves to him with all our lives, in poverty, chastity and obedience. We do it by living in community. It is precisely this that brings true joy and what leads us to share it. We know that true saints enjoyed their own deprivation: *"I no longer have anything. I have nothing left but the Bible and Theology: I was never happier than today."* (SMG)

Nothing is more attractive for a young man or a young woman, who feels a vocational call (and I speak of a vocation in a broad sense...), than to receive the testimony of Betharramites happy to live their own vocation. Indeed, seeing someone happy in their life consecrated to following Jesus, awakens their own vocation,

and reveals it. This is because that joy is sincere, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit that spreads like a healing elixir.

At least that is my experience, and I share it with simplicity. Today I recall those elderly fathers and brothers who, in my early years, I saw passing through the corridors of Barracas, Adrogué, San José, Martin Coronado, in Argentina and all those I met later and who transmitted to me that love for Betharram and that unshakable trust, which renews one's own *"Yes"* every day: *Fiat*. Let it be.

May everyone share a very merry Christmas in community, with the simplicity and joy of the Bethlehem stable, which, we already know, is reached by unknown paths.

QUESTIONS:

I remember in community my own vocation (my path until today):

- Who was the happiest religious man I have ever met?
- What reasons for satisfaction do I evoke in my religious (or lay) life and which things do I wish had happened differently?
- How do we express today the joy of the Betharramite consecration that we originally professed?

Fr. Gustavo sej

Superior General

A testimony: «Three personal Cvids in my life»

from *Let Us Dream* by Pope Francis published by Simon & Schuster copyright © 2020

I've experienced three "Cvids" in my own life: my illness, Germany, and Córdoba.

When I got really sick at the age of twenty-one I had my first experience of limit, of pain and loneliness. It changed the way I saw life. For months, I didn't know who I was, and whether I would live or die. The doctors had no idea whether I'd make it either. I remember hugging my mother and saying: "Just tell me if I'm going to die." I was in the second year of training for priesthood in the diocesan seminary of Buenos Aires.

I remember the date: August 13, 1957. I got taken to hospital by a prefect who realized mine was not the kind of flu you treat with aspirin. Straightaway they took a liter and a half of water out of the lung, and I remained there fighting for my life. The following November they operated to take out the upper right lobe of one of the lungs. I have some sense of how people with coronavirus feel as they struggle to breathe on ventilators.

[...]

My time in Germany in 1986 one might call "the Covid of displacement." It was a voluntary uprooting because I went to improve my German and seek material for my thesis, but I felt like a square peg in a round hole. I used



to walk over to the cemetery in Frankfurt and from there watch planes land and take off, pinning for my homeland. I remember the day when Argentina won the World Cup. I didn't watch the match and realized we had won the next day only when I read the papers. I got to my German class and no one said a word, but then a Japanese girl got up and wrote VIVA ARGENTINA on the blackboard and everyone burst out laughing. The teacher came in, told her to erase it, and that was that.

It was the loneliness of a triumph you can't share, the solitude of nonbelonging, of being thrown off balance. You're taken from where you are and sent to where you do not know, and in the process you learn what really matters in the place you left behind.

Sometimes the uprooting can be a healing or a radical makeover. That was my third Covid, when I was sent to Córdoba between 1990 and 1992. This time had its roots in my way of exercising leadership, as provincial and then rector. I'm sure I did a few good things, but I could be very harsh. In Córdoba they made me pay and they were right to do so.

I spent a year, ten months, and thirteen days in the Jesuit residence



SAINT MICHAEL GARICOITS, FROM HEART TO HEART

... Who does not have a word or an expression or a phrase of Saint Michael Garicoits which often resonates in his heart like background music, like an incessant call to keep trusting in the Lord, like the signature tune of the One who wants to fill us of his presence and his love? ...

An attitude rather than words

I have looked for and am still looking for what Saint Michael tells me in my life, for what is at the origin of my vocation and what marked and still marks my lifestyle as a religious. I found it and repeat it to myself every day. This is not found in a sentence, in a speech, but rather in a particular attitude of the Saint towards those who took his path as a religious brother.

Many young people used to turn to Bétharram to dedicate their lives to the Lord. They arrived, uneducated, poorly dressed, badly fed; he greeted them with tenderness. He talked to them, gave them an education, gave them a job. But what I admire



Fr. Giancarlo Monzani scj
Community of Beltrán

the most about Saint Michael is his contact with others, his ability to build healthy relationships with people: he loved them. He says he often stayed to eat with them, which was an opportunity to sing together, helping them wash the plates and pots. There's no need to describe the condition of those poor fellows' wardrobe: it was a disaster. Saint Michael therefore asked the Mother Superior of the religious community of Igon for the help of a sister to organize and put the laundry in order. Through these episodes, I read the

your”¹⁴ even though his diagnosis is negative both on the external situation and on the human and material resources: *“We walk a path day by day, without really knowing too well how we can keep to it and we foresee years when we will not be able to make ends meet.”*¹⁵ This was not the least of the paradoxes of the situation! When a military law from 1880 extended the obligation of military service to everyone, Bethlehem, and then Spain, were also seen as possible refuges for young people to escape. For him, as he repeats continually, the solution is holiness of life. But with this unexpected view from a Superior there is an unexpected human realism: *“Besides, the gaze [of political leaders] cannot pierce the obscurities of a situation more than ours since the protagonists do not know what they are doing nor*

*where they are going”*¹⁶. Concord and peace between France and the Holy Land and what he calls *“the colony”* (Argentina), are in his eyes the only possible answer. The union and communion of vision and lifestyle, especially between religious who are so distant from each other, could even become a real sign of contradiction to what this political world imposes on the outside. Each step taken in the peace and joy of a common life is for him an indication of this future which is emerging without his being able yet to see it. Between anxieties and joys, the path of Betharramite religious life is strengthened. Of course, this is not grandiose plan! It rather depicts the step by step manner of a holy vocation. The path is made by walking... ●●●

14) Circular letter, Bétharram, 15 June 1888

15) To the General Vicar of the diocese of Bayonne, Bétharram, 7 May 1889

16) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 17 May 1880



there. I celebrated Mass, heard confessions, and gave spiritual direction but hardly ever left the house, just to go to the post office. It was a kind of lockdown, self-isolating as so many of us have done lately, and it did me good. It helped me to develop ideas: I wrote and prayed a lot.

Until then I had led an ordered existence in the Society of Jesus based on my experience of leadership, first as novice-master and then, from 1973, when I was named provincial, through to 1986, when I ended my term as rector. I was settled into that way of life. So an uprooting of that kind, when they send you off the soccer field and put you on the bench, turns everything around. Your habits, your reflexive behaviors, the reference points of your existence that take shape over time—all these get turned on their head, and you have to learn to live life anew, to take up arms again.

Looking back now, I’m struck by three things in particular. First, the capacity of prayer I was given. Second, the temptations I experienced. And third—weirdest of all—why it occurred to me to read all thirty-seven volumes of Ludwig Pastor’s *History of the Popes*. I could have read a novel, or something more interesting. But from where I am now I can’t help wondering why God inspired me to read them. It was as if the Lord was preparing me with a vaccine. Once you know that papal history, there’s not much that goes on in the Vatican curia and the Church today that can shock you. It’s been a

lot of use to me!

The Covid of Córdoba was a real purification. It gave me greater tolerance, understanding, the ability to forgive, and a fresh empathy for the powerless. And patience: a lot of patience, which is the gift of understanding that important things need time, that change is organic, that there are limits and we have to work within them while keeping our eyes on the horizon, as Jesus did. I learned the importance of seeing the big in little things, and attending to the little in big things. It was a period of growth in many ways, the kind of new growth that happens after a harsh pruning.

But I must still be vigilant, because when you fall into certain defects, into particular patterns of sinfulness, and you correct yourself, the devil comes, as Jesus says, and, finding the house *“swept and put in order”* (Luke 11:25), sends seven other spirits even worse. This man’s end, says Jesus, is a lot worse than his beginning. That’s what I must guard against in my work of governing the Church, that I don’t fall back into the defects I had when I was a religious superior.

[...]

These were my main personal Cvids. What I learned was that you suffer a lot, but if you allow it to change you, you come out better. But if you dig in, you come out worse. ●●●

“Ecce venio” to be with him, to be like him...

I was born on 5 February 1993 in Kochi, Kerala to a faithful catholic couple as the eldest among two children. Having being born in a family that gives a great importance to faith and its practices, I was lucky enough to grow up in strong faith and love of God. I am eternally grateful to God for my parents who have engraved in my heart a deep sense of prayer and this is still undoubtedly the backbone of my prayer life. Since my childhood I had an ardent desire to be a priest. After completing my high school, I expressed my desire to my parents but had to face a strong opposition: I was too young to decide. I was instructed to stay at home to complete my pre-university studies. They might have thought that I may change my decision later. There were moments that made me re-think about what I ought to become in the future. But the desire in me to become a priest was so strong that I never gave up on it. Yet I always had a fear that my parents would oppose it, especially my father.

After completing my pre-university studies successfully, I began my preparation to join for the marine engineering under the guidance of my cousin brothers. But those were the times when I was going through a lot of confusion and chaos within. There were moments of *neti-neti* (not



Br. Akhil Joseph Thykkuttathil scj

He made his final profession on December 9th in Mangalore. After a short time of family vacation, he will go to do pastoral ministry in the parish of Saint Peter in Chennai (India)

this not that). I sought the help of my parish priest who is a holy priest, and he helped to realize and respond to God's call. But he in turn asked me to join the diocese to which I politely said 'no' though I knew nothing about religious life at that time.

Later I opened myself to my family about the decision. To my surprise my mother said 'yes' and that yes continues even today strongly. But with my father it was different. He was never against it but not for it. He asked me: 'who will care for us when we are old' – since I am their only boy child. I was so stubborn on my decision. But his question kept haunting me for few years of my life. He asked me to take the full responsibility of my decision. It could be because it

*on the manner of conducting the struggle.”*⁷

Faced with the implied threat to the very existence of our religious family, Father Etchecopar could never be simply a spectator! At the level of France, he never wavers from his devotion to be 'auxiliaries' to the bishop. He even sees it as a final bulwark against those who promise to expel only non-diocesan clergy: *“As we know that we are dependent on the Bishop I cling to the belief that as inhabitants and guardians of his houses we should not be concerned; we will be allowed to continue our works under episcopal responsibility.”*⁸

The slow implementation of the founder's canonisation process, like the need to return explicitly to his doctrine because of the death of the first companions, pushes the Superior to always enliven the whole body of our little institute. Always with the same prudent concern: *“Let us not tie the hands of the Lord through our faults; let us be men of prayer and the Rule; innocence and prayer are powerful (according to the founder) ... so let us throw ourselves headlong into the bosom of the Father who is so good ...”*⁹. Although the trials are stressful and a source of great uncertainty, the superior does not shy away from a deep trust in God; he even sees it as a providential opportunity: *“(The situation) will only purify the Church by giving us the opportunity to show what*

*charity and the patience of the friends of God are really like ... but the chalice always makes us fearful.”*¹⁰ The right reaction in the eyes of the religious is to stand firm in our vocation: *“Oh let us redouble our zeal at the sight of the efforts of the children of these times! Let us blush with shame when we see them risking their lives... let us rush... with the deep conviction that we suffer very little compared to glory...”*¹¹. While everything around him is in flux, he remains firmly rooted:

*“In the midst of the anguish of the present hour, may the most perfect peace preserve your hearts ... Nothing contributes to the salvation of the ship ... except the calm and harmony of the navigation and the observance of order in unity and promptness in obedience. Nothing more attracts help from On High than charity and the union of minds and hearts.”*¹² Not without a tactical spirit, he even considers that this respectful attitude and the work of religious could work powerfully in their favour, as the authorities are always interested in our outward success: *“... to maintain and develop the religious AND patriotic feelings of our Basque and Béarnais fellow citizens, so numerous in Argentina.”*¹³

Above all, the loyalty and enthusiasm of the young shoots motivate him and give him a joy that opens up confidence; for him, he sees the opening of *“a new era of light and fer-*

7) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 September 1891

8) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 1st July 1880

9) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 19 July 1880

10) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 9 November 1883

11) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 19 February 1883

12) Circular letter, juin 1880

13) To the minister of foreign affairs, [October 1881]



"The prophecy of the future..."¹

Some people have the gift of focussing on the summit, others on the way to get there!

Such was the gift of Father Etchecopar. Not that he was unaware of the goal. On the contrary! As much as our founder spoke very little about the politics of his time or the Second Empire, Father Etchecopar often alludes to the vagaries of France, which had become an anti-Catholic Republic from 1873-75. The superior is a convinced monarchist; He isn't shy about that! But when a local newspaper, "Le Mémorial des Pyrénées", criticized the request to support the Republic in 1892², he wrote: **"The Pope has just spo-**

ken and expressed his will... this newspaper flies a flag that is opposed to ours; this ideology offends convictions within us that are dearer than life itself. So allow me... to differ from you on this point..."³.

He had received from the Founder an assurance of our indissoluble bond with the Pope. And that was a lot to say and think, when we know that everything was being secretly prepared in anticipation of an expulsion that was already worrying. **"We could be expelled at any time, so we have assigned to each one their own provisory base..."**⁴. To the Superiors of Argentina, he writes: **"Thank you for holding open your arms ready to welcome us"**⁵. The **"volcano of the revolution"**⁶ is all the more threatening as the Catholic political group is divided: **"The Catholic union is getting organised... but we are so divided, firstly on principles but above all**

of France, then majority royalists, to accept the republican institutions, in order to better fight the anticlerical laws.

3) To Mr. de Juantho, Betharram, 9 July 1892

4) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 5 November 1880

5) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 June 1880

6) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 9 November 1883

was against his expectations. I came across the Sacred Heart Fathers and Brothers of Betharram through my cousin brother who is also member of this congregation. This brought me to the doorsteps of Betharram in June 2010.

The instant love I had for Betharram the moment I stepped in is preserved and nurtured since then. I always had a special love towards this way of life that allowed me to never give up on my love of God. As a saying goes "the first impression is the best impression", I was well impressed and attracted to this family the moment I was planted here. Sincere words of appreciation to all the fathers and brothers who motivated and guided me during my aspirancy at Maria Kripa, Mangalore. Then the following year I was sent to pursue my philosophical studies in Kristu Jyoti College in Bangalore from 2011-2013. These two years challenged me to climb the steps of academical pursuit by breaking the barriers of my thinking and opening wide the horizons of my knowledge.

After completing my philosophical studies, I was sent to one of the mission centers of our congregation in Hojai, Assam, to help



our fathers in education ministry and boarding. Immediately after that I entered into canonical year of Novitiate at Shobhana Shakha in Bangalore from 2014-2016. Then on May 14, on the feast day of our founder St Michael, I made my first religious profession. I did my theological studies in St Joseph's Interdiocesan seminary in Mangalore from 2016-2019. During my scholastic years, I was sent to various mission centers during my summer holidays, such as education ministry at Simaluguri, village ministry in Bidar and Kolar and various parish ministries. While preparing for my final profession, I was asked to render my help to our fathers in our mission center in Langting, Assam. Though the plan was for a few months, the present pandemic situation prolonged my experience for a year which helped me to have a fruitful and effective ministry.

After all these years of formation I can proudly say that my life and experience in Betharram has taught

me to have a Heart of Jesus: the same heart which emptied himself to enrich others. The heart that gives more importance to the good and well being of the other. This

is the 'kenosis of the Heart of Jesus'. It is to this kenosis that I am invited to partake through my life and ministry. It is only by imitating the humble and obedient Jesus, that I could experience the joy within and can bring the same happiness to others. To this invitation I reply: "ecce venio". A 'Here I am' to break the barriers and take on the challenges of my life, a 'Here I am' to willingly accept any way of life that God calls me to live, a 'Here I am' to be courageous to go where no one dare to go. This 'ecce venio' allows me to be more dynamic, loving, deep and selfless in my relationship with God and with my companions.

All through my formation I was fortunate to have many formators, fathers and brothers who were true spiritual support and example to challenge me. Those exemplary lives

also played a vital role in motivating me to make a radical choice of a vocation to priesthood in the Betharramite family.

As I proceed to make my final profession in the family of Betharram on 3rd December, may God sustain in me a grateful awareness of the gift I have received and nourish it to reach the zenith of his gift. May he help me to find myself in him that I may not lose the grace, rather nurture it to attain the sanctity of my life. Thus I may be holy as late pope St John Paul II says: "Christ needs holy priests". May our Lady of Betharram and our father Michael Garicoits intercede for me so that I may strive to sustain the sentiments of the Heart of Jesus in my life and in my ministry wherever he calls me...♦♦♦



His great concern had been the awakening of vocations, although the energy expended for it had not been rewarded here. He had to live with this frustration of not seeing the fruits of his labor. But, the Lord gave him the grace to see this birth and this growth of Betharramite vocations, outside our hexagon, in the young Churches like the CI and Benin or in the Churches of the periphery like India and Thailand, Vietnam or South America. In the crossing desert here, these oases brought him comfort. Without asking him, I know that he will contribute to this birth of a vocation here, it is our hope.

out his life. He was the linchpin of the provincial review "Entre-Nous" (lit.: "among us"); in 1979, he was appointed provincial superior for 4 years. In 1983, the new provincial appointed him as director to the college of Charles de Foucauld in Casablanca. He had the grace to receive Pope John Paul II during his visit to Morocco who celebrated the Eucharist in the school ground. He managed the delicate transfer of the college to the diocese after 40 years of Betharramite presence. In 1986, he was appointed rector of the sanctuaries of Bétharram, but 3 years later he was sent to Notre Dame of the Refuge in Anglet as chaplain of the Servants of Mary where he remained for 5 years. He was also entrusted by the diocese with the service of ecumenism

In 1994, the new formation house in the Ivory Coast lacked elders, therefore, he was appointed to the Adiapodoumé community which was also responsible for the parish of Saint Bernard. There, he displayed

his real talents in liturgical animation, in particular in accompanying the construction of the chapel dedicated to the one who was then "Blessed" Mary of Jesus Crucified. In 1998, he was appointed director and superior of the Maison Neuve, retirement home here in Bétharram, and he organized the transition of the functioning of the retirement home to a lay director. In 2009, he was again sent to Anglet as superior of the community. In 2014, it was his return to Bétharram, first to the Notre Dame community for 3 years, then as a resident at the retirement home.

Father Gabriel finished his "course" on 27 November 2020 at the hospital of Lourdes without complaining of his illness, expressing the fewest possible demands on the healthcare staff. He was of that race of flying camp that Saint Michael Garicoits dreamed of. A witness of ever-readiness in obedience and daily commitment to carry out the will of God. ♦♦♦

Father Gabriel VERLEY scj

Haubourdin, 22 March 1928 - Lourdes, 27 November 2020 (France)

Fr. Gabriel was born on 22 March 1928 at Haubourdin, in the North of France (close to Belgium). He was 11 years old when war broke out. To protect themselves from the bombardments, the family decided to go south; the town of Bagnères de Bigorre welcomed them. He became a student of the college of Betharram at the age of 13, and then the following year joined the apostolic school. His adolescence was lived in the drama of war, with all the restrictions! The year of the Founder's canonization, in 1947, he entered the novitiate in Balarin where he celebrated his first religious profession on 3 November 1948. He joined the brand new house of formation, the scholasticate of Bel Sito in Floirac; he was part of the first group having lived all the philosophical and theological training in Gironde, along with the elders who came back from Bethlehem, driven out by the war.

He celebrated his perpetual profession on All Saints' Day in 1952; he was ordained a priest on 29 June 1955 in the cathedral of Bordeaux. The day after his ordination, he was first appointed in the community of Saint-Palais, where he remained for 7 years, teaching at the school of Etchecopar. It is an important stage which allowed him to have a particular attachment to Saint Michael Gar-



icoits, the community of Saint-Palais being in charge of Ibarre and the community living in the birthplace of Father Auguste Etchecopar, the beloved disciple of the Founder.

In 1962, it was the departure for Beit Jala, seminary of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, directed by Betharram for nearly 50 years. In 1965, he was appointed superior of the community in Côte d'Ivoire and director of the *cours normal Saint-Michel* (a teacher training school); then the following year the whole community moved to Katiola to take charge of the Saint John seminary. In 1970, the new provincial called him to Betharram, as assistant and responsible for vocational animation, of which he would keep an unceasing concern through-

Going out in community in the time of Covid

"Serve your good master with an open heart full of joy. The right way is to see all events and all obstacles in the spirit of faith as being in the hands of our Lord and to hear him say to you, on every occasion, as He did to the disciples, 'It is I. Do not fear. Have faith.'"

St. Michael Garicoits
(Correspondence I, letter nr. 4, 17/11/1829)

God's providence has been evident in the day to day life of our Hojai community in the Northeast of India. The pandemic situation of Covid-19 gave us the chance to look into our community life in Hojai, Simaluguri and Langting in various ways. It gave us more time to be with the Lord and with members of the community. Though it was a difficult period of time, we were able to find some resources to help the needy around our house and in our parishes. Retreat during lockdown under the guidance of Fr Biju Paul Alappat helped us to refresh ourselves in the spirituality of our founder. We helped each other not to



Fr. Edwin Manavalan
Community of Hojai-Langting

stagnate within our Community and various activities were initiated. During this time all three of our communities planted hundreds of trees in the campuses. Social media was used in an effective way to reach out to the students, parents and parishioners. This initiative was appreciated by various priests, sisters and the laity.

"Forward, always forward!" Though the pandemic situation brings worry to humanity, we need to go ahead. As for government directives, we are following the guidance and getting back to the normalcy of life. In Simaluguri, Fr. Justin is Parish Priest and helping the



From left to right: Frs. Bistis, Jacob, Edwin, Valan, Jestin, Sathish

Dancila school out. Fr. Sathish is in charge at the Sacred Heart, Betharram School. In Langting, Fr. Valan has taken up the responsibility for St. Mary's and St. Joseph schools. Fr. Jacob has

been appointed Administrator for the northeast communities and he is helping out in schools and hostels. In Hojai Fr. Bistis is engaged in the school and the parish and I assist them whenever they need it. Last month Fr. Jesuraj went to his new mission place in Tiptur as parish priest and we thanked him for the valuable service he rendered to our community in the northeast and to our congregation. Every month we make sure we come together in different centres and share our joys and struggles, our thoughts and resources. And this always gives us a boost and the certainty that we are never alone. We conclude our monthly meeting with prayer.

October was the month of the Holy Rosary and we went to various houses in our parishes to pray this beautiful prayer with our parishioners. In the Educational institutions, the classes have started and for the time being the government has limited the number of classes and students. Though the number of Covid-19 cases is increasing, people are less concerned and try to cope with the pandemic situation. Bishops have requested the slowing down of extra



activities in parishes and educational institutions in different centres.

As our founder reminds us '*God all; myself nothing*', it is very important to keep our trust in him and he will guide us in the proper way, in the proper time.

Do not be afraid, God is with us always and we are never alone. ●●●

a Konkani, I am a North Indian...and so on?" I too heard my friends ask, "do they treat me like this just because I am from Tamil Nadu, because I am from Kerala, because I am from Andhra, because I am from Karnataka, and so on...?". I have witnessed my batch brothers & sisters including me ask at times these questions and feel not so good about it because these questions were provoked by highly-trained people in their own proper religious houses or in the academic institutes. Is it not so? Have we not heard so? Have we not said so?

I compare it with "cancer" (only a metaphor) because it means something abnormal growing in us which will slowly kill the person completely. In this sense, though we have responded to the call of God personally; we are at times tempted not to

accept that the other person is also called by the same God to be in His service. It will never allow us to grow in a healthy way. Even today, our people of God in India feel that our Church is divided by these issues. When I go out of our land, I hear people asking about the 'castes' in India. It is my personal experience. Don't you think so? People do say that we could do better things if we all are united. I hope my above said explanation will help you to understand better what I have personally shared. Once again, my sincere apologies to those who are hurt and I say that it was not at all intended by me. I have expressed my personal reflection from my heart. *May we have a heart that truly loves.* ●●●



An explanation

In the previous NEF of November 2020, I was invited to share on the words of St. Michael Garicoits which inspired me in my religious life. While I was sharing my personal – I repeat – my personal experience and conviction; I wrote that *“I was sad at times to see that Indian formation houses were in a process of being eaten up by certain cancers like regionalism, language issues, caste issues, ethnic issues, etc. It was painful to see that trained people treat formees with indifference on the basis of region, language, ethnicity, castes, etc. It is also disappointing to see a complete change when a brother becomes a priest”*.

I remain grateful to the persons who messaged me & called me to appreciate me for what I have shared as my experience and conviction. But at the same time, I heard that certain persons in our vicariate as well as outside the vicariate expressed their disagreement and hurt on what I have written. At this point, I would like to place before them my sincere apologies. I am sincerely sorry if my words were strong and had hurt anyone. I never intended to undervalue anyone or to criticize the formation work that was done in the formation of our Betharram Family.

Let me verify the terms used with your permission. I used neither ‘our



**Fr. Stervin
Selvadass scj**
General Councillor for formation •
Community of Bangalore

formation houses’ nor ‘Betharram formation houses’ rather I used the term ‘Indian Formation Houses’. I also used the word ‘at times’ not ‘always’. I used the following terms because from the beginning of my formation, I shared my formation with other brothers & sisters of other congregations. During my novitiate, I had encountered brothers and sisters from more than 15 congregations in the inter-novitiate program. During my philosophical studies, I had met brothers from more than 10 dioceses in the inter diocesan-seminary. I did my regency/pastoral experience with the MSFS fathers. During my theological studies, I had acquainted brothers and sisters from more than 6 congregations.

In all these sharing of relationships, I have experienced with many of my class mates who shared with me saying, “Why does this professor / father / sister behave like this to me? Is it because I am a Tamilian, I am a Malayali, I am a Telugu, I am a Kanadiga, I am

Observations from the Council of the Congregation

In the history of the congregation, this is the first time that we have made use of means of communication such as videoconferencing so that the Council of the Congregation could take place. All the participants were impressed upon that this tool is a great means of staying connected in the vicariates and the regions as well as in the congregation. Maintaining that brotherly bond remains the daily challenge of religious life. At the same time, it is only one way, as cultivating the brotherly bond also demands in-person meetings. The Regional Superiors have indeed emphasised that this Covid-19 pandemic touching the planet has prevented us from being present in the different vicariates. It is difficult to sort out or to move certain issues forward even to discern some projects without having real meetings with different brothers, meetings to listen, to consult, to discuss.

Going back over the topic of the year 2020, ‘Go out, as community, to meet life and its multiple peripheries’, emphasised that this epidemic has allowed each community to come together again, take time to share, to pray and to celebrate. The communities have been creative in order to share their prayer by social media, to help people in need, to create prayer networks and share by using Zoom for example (that’s not an advertisement) !



**Fr. Jean-Dominique
Delgue scj**
Vicar General

The communities have tried not to stay shut away in their own world but to live in this reality of health constraints connected to other people or to the new situations arising.

Lockdown did not stop the life of the Congregation. Even if certain activities were at a standstill, that did not prevent us from being able to continue to reflect, consider the future in the Vicariates or the Regions with potential new foundations. Certain Vicariates had to come to the aid of scholastic establishments closed for health reasons by supporting, for example, the salaries of educational staff. This situation can only remind each Region as well as each religious about the way we live out our vows of poverty as the economic crisis is in front of us and is very near.

The Council of the Congregation has taken time to share about grounds for hope as well as concerns. A great many positive aspects have been outlined in the carrying out of the guidance of the General Chapter of 2017. However, the Betharramite religious

life remains a path of conversion where we keep starting over again to bring about a community life which is continually more brotherly, a better sharing of possessions and spiritual accompaniment for each religious who has to improve his religious consecration in a faithfulness to prayer. Young religious brothers who are going into other Vicariates make it possible to bring help and new breath, notably to certain Vicariates where the average age of the members might be high. The Council of the Congregation is a place where one can measure to what extent the Congregation is a living body and takes part in the mission of the Universal Church while bringing along the richness of the charism of St Michael Garicoits.

Besides this aspect of the life of the Congregation, the council approached various subjects : How to put forward

the 'Year of Father Etchecopar'? A reflection, from documents of the Holy See, on the abuse of minors as well as the abuse of power and knowledge; the challenge of *Fratelli Tutti*; how do we find a place for brotherly correction in our communities and Vicariates?; communication in the Congregation; the Congregation's economic question has also been approached on the basis of the accounts of 2019.

A new year is coming... the theme of the year 2021 is 'We go out to share joy'. It is certainly a timely opportunity to have this theme in these difficult times that we are experiencing. How do we communicate joy without being able to make people experience it? Each religious is invited to deepen his spiritual life, to live in the place God wants him now to fulfil his vocation. Whether in community or in a Vicariate, why not organise a celebration



RL. 205/t • The Superior General with his Council approved the **exchange of a property** of the Congregation in Los Cocos (Argentina), occupied until now on loan by the Sisters of the *Fraternidad Mondástica Abba, Padre*, with a piece of land of the Sisters also located in Los Cocos. (Region FrAE)

RL. 206/b • The Superior General with his Council approved the **acceptation of the parishes of Achar and San Gregorio de Polanco** (Diocese of Tacuarembó, Uruguay), which pastoral minister is entrusted to the community of Paso de los Toros. (Region FrAE)

RL. 205/q • In accordance with Article 55 of the Acts of the General Chapter, the Superior General and his Council, in dialogue with the Council of the Congregation, reassessed and fixed by decree **the ordinary contributions of the Regions to the general fund** for the years 2021-2022, until the next General Chapter. The decree has been communicated to the Regional Superiors and the Regional Bursars.



In memoriam :

We received the sad news of the sudden death of *Mrs Margaret June Arran*, Betharramite lay associate of the parish of Whitnash (England), on November 10th. June suffered a heart attack at the age of 82. Her funeral will take place in St. Joseph's Whitnash Church, on Thursday 17th December (10:45am; St. Josephs Rc Church, Murcott Road East, Whitnash, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV31 2JJ).

Our prayers and thoughts reach out to her family. We express also our condolences to the Companions, the group of Betharramite lay associates in England. Let us keep June in our prayer. May Our Lady of Betharram lead her with tenderness into our Father's House.



♦♦♦ "I would say the SCJ spirituality has a great effect on our lives. For over twenty years we have been 'fed' on the writings and spirituality of St Michael. We feel very fortunate to be able to discuss aspects of the faith at all of our now monthly meetings. We also follow aspects of St Ignatius' spirituality, which was very influential in St Michael's life. I think the aspects that have most influence on our everyday lives are that we try to stay close to God in prayer, we try to live daily discerning God's will for us and we try to emulate the care and concern for others which is shown by the Priests and Brothers." (June Arran, NEF, April 2015)

DECISIONS OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL

GATHERED ON 25 & 26 NOVEMBER 2020



RL. 206 • The Superior General with his Council approved the following **appointments of the Community Superiors**:

Region/ Vicariate	Community	Superior	Mandate
Region SMG	France-Spain	Betharram - Maison Neuve	Fr. Pierre Grech
	France-Spain	Pau	Fr. Hervé Kouamé
		Kouakou	1 st
	Italy	Ponte a Elsa	Fr. Albino De Giobbi
	Italy	Langhirano	Fr. Aldo Nespoli
	Italy	Pistoia	Fr. Natale Re
	Italy	Colico	Fr. Angelo Riva
	Italy	Lissone-Castellazzo	Fr. Giacomo Spini
	Italy	Albate	Fr. Alessandro Paniga
	Ivory Coast	Yamoussoukro	Fr. Luc Martial
Region FrAE		Kouadio	2 nd
	Ivory Coast	Dabakala	Fr. Raoul Segla
			exceptionally 3 rd
	Brazil	Paulinia	Fr. Wagner Aparecido
		Ferreira	2 nd
	Brazil	Passa Quatro	Fr. Wagner Dos Reis
	Paraguay	Collegio San José Apostolico	Fr. Carlos Ecurra
	Paraguay	Ciudad del Este	Fr. Javier Irala
	Arg/Ur	Paso de los toros	Fr. Alcides Riveros
		Dias	1 st
	Arg/Ur	Barracas	Fr. Sebastián García
			2 nd
	Arg/Ur	Adrogué	Fr. Osmar Caceres
		Spain	1 st

RL. 307 • The Superior General with his Council granted **one-year extension of the indult of excommunication to Fr. Subancha Yindeengarm** (Vicariate of Thailand, Region SMJC), that is until October 15th, 2021.

RL. 205/h • The Superior General with his Council decided to present to the **di-aconal ministry: Br Serge Pacôme Appaouh, Br. Arnaud Christian Yao, Br. Arnaud Kadjo N'Dah and Br. Djéban Koffi Landry** of the Vicariate of Holy Coast (Region SMG).

of vocation where everyone can tell of the path he has travelled since the call of Christ to give everything to him, to give thanks together for each vocation which is the gift of the Spirit? Vocation animation will have a particular place all throughout this year. Each religious, with his community, can take some time to look over the Acts of the 27th General Chapter (articles 81 to 111) together.

A Council of the Congregation cannot have a conclusion but an opening to the life present and to the life still to come. Also, these few words of Pope Francis can reach each religious and each community of the Congregation to go out together to 'bring others the same joy'!

'Therefore, let us ask the Lord to give us eyes attentive to our brothers and sisters, especially those who are suffering. As Jesus's disciples we do not want to be indifferent or individualistic. These are the two unpleasant attitudes that run counter to harmony. Indifferent: I look the other way. Individualist: looking out only for one's own interest. The harmony created by God asks that we look at others, the needs of others, the problems of others, in communion. We want to recognise the human dignity in every person, whatever his or her race, language or condition might be. Harmony leads you to recognise human dignity, that harmony created by God, with humanity at the centre.' (Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, 12 August 2020, Catechesis "To heal the world": 2. Faith and human dignity) ●●●

The search for a synthesis | Council of the Congregation • November 2020

Theme of the year:

"WE GO OUT TO SHARE JOY"

(cf. Acts of the 27th General Chapter, no. 81-111)

A premise: In its setting, the General Chapter has placed the sharing of joy as the crowning achievement of the whole journey.

An equilibrium must be maintained between the reference to the same Source and the Going out on the mission.

How are we drinking at source? How are we living our community life? How do we go out on the mission to share the same joy?

Let us take a *test* of our joy...



Fr. Graziano Sala scj
Secretary General

Strong themes	Contents	Actions
Experiencing the joy personally	<p>A. Joy is a state of the Spirit: “...I remind you to rekindle the gift of God, which is in you...” (2 Tim. 1:6).</p> <p>B. Joy is a gift and a mission.</p> <p>C. Joy is an inner disposition.</p> <p>D. Joy, for St. Michael, is closely linked to the idea of “position”.</p> <p>E. A definition of joy: it is not a spontaneous emotion, but a disposition to follow Christ which constitutes a set of Christian virtues. The Christian joy is a fruit of the Spirit, so it is a point of arrival, it is the result of a journey (Gal. 5). There is often talk of an “explosion of joy”.</p>	<p>A. Some questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Am I happy in what I live? 2. How does this joy translate into everyday gestures? 3. What are the obstacles that prevent me from being joyful? (cf. Acts of CG No 85) <p>B. Remembering one’s own vocation and one’s Betharramite vocation.</p> <p>C. Deepening the spiritual life.</p> <p>D. The importance of spiritual accompaniment. In this regard, it should be recalled:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of the Superior of the community: that he encourages the religious to live the spiritual accompaniment so as to remain faithful to their vocation and mission. (cf. Acts CG No 106) 2. The role of the Regional Vicars: that they ensure that each religious of the Vicariate has a spiritual director. (cf. Acts of CG No 107)
Sharing of the joy in the community	<p>A. I experience joy in the Community, when I am generous and willing (<i>disponible</i>) and live the joy of consecration.</p>	<p>A. How do we manifest the joy of consecration?</p> <p>B. It is necessary to re-propose the sharing of one’s joy in the Community (to make the <i>narratio fidei</i>, the <i>narratio vite</i>).</p> <p>C. Insisting not only on personal prayer but also community prayer.</p> <p>D. Preparing a framework for Community <i>retreats</i>; to direct the retreat of the Community on the theme of “the joy of consecration”.</p>

Sharing and re-newing of the joy in the Going out on mission	<p>A. In the Manifesto of the Founder, the first missionary action proposed to us is the sharing of the same joy.</p> <p>B. There are two things that need to be summed up: sharing in the Community and going out on missions.</p> <p>C. Going out on the shared mission to experience joy. “Going out” is an irreplaceable dynamic. Vocation animation is the result of this shared joy.</p> <p>D. It is necessary to go out in the shared mission to experience joy. When you go out for the mission, you return with full of joy. You have to meet with people: it is not enough to stream masses, prayers... it is necessary for people to see us in their homes, in their territory...</p> <p>E. Speaking of joy, we must speak of vocational, pastoral care of young people.</p>	<p>A. To use the community meetings to accompany the apostolic communities.</p> <p>B. When one return to the Community, one have to feel the need to share the joy of the mission.</p> <p>C. For Vocation Animation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We open our communities to bring meaningful experiences. 2. “The vocation animation team presents, at an assembly, to all the religious a vocational project...” (cf. Acts of GC 88) 3. “Twice a year the responsible of the vocation animation team must be invited to the Vicariate Council to report on the project and the vocational path of the aspirants”. (cf. Acts of GC 89) 4. “There should be a Regional vicar in the Regional Council responsible for vocational animation.” (cf. Acts of GC 92)