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## A word from the superior general

### Attentive to the cries of life: bringing salvation to the margins

*"Go instead to the lost sheep of the people of Israel. Along the way, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is near."*  
(Mt 10. 6-7)

Dear Betharramites:

The season of Lent is a call to pastoral conversion; for this, the Church invites us to come out of our comfort zone and to dare to reach out to the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel (EG 20). We go out in community, experience an encounter, an authentic mission. The existential peripheries that surround us are increasing with great intensity, we do not live "in the best of all possible worlds", but in one that can be improved. We must be ready to get ready and change: renewing conscience, apostolic ardour, and assuming our missionary responsibility. *"Whom shall I send? Who will go on my behalf?:" Here I am, send me"* (Is 6. 8).

This community decision *"does not imply running towards the world aimlessly and without purpose. More*

often it is rather to pause, and put aside anxiety, to look with our eyes and listen, or to stop being hasty and pay attention to the slow mover by the roadside " (EG 46).

A basic principle states: "Man is created to praise, revere and serve God, our Lord, and thus save his soul." I remember seeing many times in America, a slogan under crosses planted by the missionaries at the crossroads, or at the entrance of the houses, that said: "Save your soul!" It was an old custom that evangelisers had, to show the intrinsic link between mission and Christian salvation (Ad Gentes 7). Today also, as missionary disciples we are sent and at the same time we are recipients, we are a community that goes on mission and receives salvation. Many cultures are still not marked by the gospel of Jesus. We live in a global village that brings the peripheries to the door and the world experiences an almost permanent exodus. They are impoverished brothers who have registered the desire to reach a fullness of life, but they cannot find anyone to help them. But if they find it, they discover what it means to be called a child of God, because evangelical love leads to divine filiation and frees them from many chains.

Even today, in the era of digital technology, Jesus Christ wants everyone to have life and have it abundantly and forever! (Cf. John 10:10). It is an open and free invitation. We have not been given "a product to sell, but a life to communicate: that of

God, the fruit of his reconciling love, which is the eternal fullness of human life" (Pope Francis) This life is better appreciated among the "population that lives in the peripheries and impoverished areas, that survives in the midst of great human pain and seeks immediate solutions for their needs" (EG 63).

Going out involves sacrifice, leaving our comforts behind. Unfortunately, salvation and eternal life, the cross and the sacrificial sacrifice are a little absent from certain pastoral and missionary concerns, too focused on updating the media, on the self-gratification of numbers, or on unnecessary media exposure. Our missionary style, on the other hand, is discreet, hidden and generous; moved by the spring of a love that is offered. Called to live the experience of New Life in Christ, conversion leads us to assume the challenge of being saved and holy in the family of God's friends, and to communicate that same happiness to others, as a sign in the midst of the world.

But what is our relationship with the world actually like? Today we often live in ambiguity, because the world "consumes us". The freedom we strive to defend enslaves itself by "changing its owner" ... God, on the other hand, is constant, and loves the world (from before creation) and sends his Son to save it for his sake (cf Jn 3.16; 10.10).

Religious and lay people, we have a central place in the mission to extend that love. All the baptized, in

particular our brothers of Betharram, renew their mission with their "here I am". Lay people, in particular, with their ecclesial faith and professional competence, show by their witness the reality and effectiveness of being in the world despite not being of the world, nor coming from it. Likewise, with conjugal love that generates life and family, they transform the world through work and are in the forefront of the proclamation, of liturgical life, of catechetical formation and even of charity among the poorest of the community.

Our life, in communion with the laity, also rests on baptismal consecration. We were anointed by the Holy Spirit and share the same mission! So many Betharramites come to my mind who dedicated their lives to mission in Latin America (among the Indians and the Basques), in China, in Thailand among the marginalised mountain Karen tribes, in Africa, the Holy Land and Europe, and today they continue to do so. Their planting of the gospel will never be in vain and was actually the seed of religious and lay vocations, because they managed to touch hearts, and move them towards Christ, incorporated them into the Church of all nations.

Finally, the mission of Jesus Christ, humble and obedient, is made real in the sacraments, sources of life. Restricting mission to proclaiming and witnessing to the values of the Kingdom not only reduces it, but also deprives it of the salvific and

transforming power of the missionary work of the Church founded on the paschal event of Christ.

I contemplate with my mind the faces of so many baptized with their families and godparents in the missions of northern Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. I remember the excitement of grandmothers who received a long-awaited confirmation from the Bishop. The weeping of the penitents who received the sacrament of mercy. Weddings in the middle of the field. The anointing of the sick, who build with their faith even in pain. And the masses in which we all felt ourselves to be God's People, holy and loved, fed on the same plate with the bread of the poor. How can we not love mission if it strengthens the root of ecclesial faith!

How good it is to evangelize! How I miss all that! Today my position is here (in Rome), but my heart is with you missionaries. Let us go out in community! You are the arms of Jesus to make the Kingdom of God more present. Let us not be afraid!

Let us help to reform and renew the missionary sense of the whole life and activity of the Church. Let us do it with the testimony of happy religious, bearers of salvation, so that the world may believe in the proclamation and sanctify itself: just as Saint Michael Garicoits wanted it. Let us plant and water. As for the rest..., as always: the Lord will do it.

**Fr. Gustavo scj**  
*Superior General*

## Homily • Holy Mass, Blessing and Imposition of the ashes

Basilica of Santa Sabina, Ash Wednesday, 26 February 2020

*We are dust in the universe. Yet we are dust loved by God. It pleased the Lord to gather that dust in his hands and to breathe into it the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). We are thus a dust that is precious, destined for eternal life. We are the dust of the earth, upon which God has poured out his heaven, the dust that contains his dreams. We are God's hope, his treasure and his glory.*

*Ashes are thus a reminder of the direction of our existence: a passage from dust to life. We are dust, earth, clay, but if we allow ourselves to be shaped by the hands of God, we become something wondrous. More often than not, though, especially at times of difficulty and loneliness, we only see our dust! But the Lord encourages us: in his eyes, our littleness is of infinite value. So let us take heart: we were born to be loved; we were born to be children of God. ●●●*



## Guidelines & Directives (I) 2020

*Fr. Gustavo Agín scj*

### *Guidelines, directives: what are they for?*

We know that to support and guide the young men preparing to become lifelong Betharramites we need not only to constantly review and update our procedures, but also to remain faithful to the content and methods specific to our charism and which we have learned through experience.

Over the past few years, the Ratio Formationis was updated, but then recently a new Church document was issued. We have also incorporated these into our scheme and I set out the following points to ensure they are taken into account and applied in the Betharram Houses worldwide. Our formation and vocations leadership teams are also working on this in some regions. I would ask them to reflect on this document - it is the outcome of the deep reflections we shared when we held the Betharramite Formation Service meeting last January.

Why do we need such guidelines? How should they be assessed, internalised and applied? I set them out, one by one, below:

In the face of the serious problems she has had to confront due to the conduct of some of its ordained and/or religious members, the Church is now insisting on the need that candidates are prepared in good time so they achieve the human and psychological maturation necessary. This is a requirement that could lead to someone being excluded from ordination to the priesthood or prevented from making his perpetual vows. That is why it has been de-

ecided to use the best adapted psychological tools to get to know the person undergoing formation in the first stage thereof, i.e., during postulancy. (G&D I.1)

Postulancy can never be a matter for improvisation. This experience requires a qualified facilitator and the presence of a community (RdV 140). Moreover, with no clear budget committing genuine resources to support the formation house, we are running the risk of hosting an inordinate number of young men without having the wherewithal to offer them what they need to grow their vocation in community. (G&D I.2)

Formative "accompaniment" or support is no vague formula. In our Congregation, some formators find they have to put their own personal plans on hold in order to be able to give priority to this ministry which falls to them... "no ifs no buts". On the other hand, it is absurd to present a candidate to the novitiate or holy orders about whom one has only a vague idea even though he has already spent four years with us. The same applies to the presentation for perpetual vows. The support and guidance we are talking about must be provided by the formator; it must be scheduled, frequent - at least once or twice a week for example - and must always take priority (it cannot be postponed on any pretext). This is the outcome of an agreement freely entered into between formator and the person being formed. It is irreplaceable. (G&D I.3.)

The Betharram formation is not the sum of stages juxtaposed one on top of the other, like individual modules. It is synony-

mous with continuity and implies dialogue between formators; it's teamwork and consensus. (G&D I.4)

The future of the Congregation depends on our remaining faithful to the received charism. We must help to discern it within the candidate's heart: is it there already? what does he need to acquire it? What is it within me that is incompatible with Betharramite charism? What face of Jesus Christ am I portraying in my behaviour? The answers are to be found by prioritising formation of the interior being... by challenging, seriously but charitably, those who attempt to make up for their human and spiritual immaturity by concealing their shortcomings beneath external appearances but who do not work on improving themselves. Let's work on the internal so it matches the external (DS 107): we have to work jointly with the Holy Spirit, chief architect on this Project, for this to happen. (G&D I.5.)

The formation team is necessary. We have suffered in the past from certain approaches that were too personal when admitting candidates. The regional superior or vicar cannot take one road and the formator another; a shared vision and a common discernment must be present. Formators do not work in isolation, they are the witnesses and must interact well with their superiors and the formative community. (G&D I.6)

Where a candidate comes to us from one or other formation house, we must obtain precise information about him from his previous formator or from the rector of the seminary. Without this information, the Congregation should not allow him to go forward and pass to the next stages. This

procedure cannot be put off until later. (G&D I.7)

A form of rigidity, a liking for external signs and atavistic tendencies have re-emerged in some young people. These are not good vocational signs. From his first steps in the formation house, a young man in formation must be tested to see if his liking for external show or even exhibitionism is justified or represents a particular value or if these are merely expressions of vacuousness and immaturity. (G&D I.8)

Some younger formators have not had the grace of experiencing the process which led to the Ratio Formationis being drawn up. This process can be adapted to different realities, thereby avoiding improvisation or a theoretical lecture. An international meeting of formators will be held shortly for this purpose. (G&D I.9)

Working in formation is a "vocation apart" (in its own right). It is not easy to discern what or who the future formators will be. They must not only be given the preparation through specialised ad hoc courses, but also must obtain a genuine qualification, enjoy community support and guidance and have lived a prior apostolic experience of at least three years duration, before they are entrusted with this task in a formation house. Cooperation between the formators in the various different vicariates must also be considered. (G&D I.10)

Insofar as concerns specialised studies, we cannot but ask ourselves the question what do we want with a philosopher, a theologian, a bible scholar, a canon law specialist or a Church historian? Why does Betharram want a psychologist, engineer, lawyer or accountant? If we don't ask that question, we open the door to a multi-

tude of arbitrary possibilities which each person chooses from according to their own individual criteria. That is not a type of discernment suited to a small religious community like ours. Once the solemnly professed has made his choice of ultimate formation, after discussing the matter realistically with his formator and superiors, this choice must be accepted and supported by the Congregation; however this must not be without being offered the conditions for it to be so accepted and not without asking the religious before his ordination or profession, to devote a significant period of time to pastoral work, released from all studying. (G&D I.11)

It happens sometimes that we get applications in writing for ordination (or vows) which do not clearly express the candidate's motivations. At other times these applications merely repeat the chronology of their "vocation" as already recited in the supporting documents. It would be good if the applications briefly expressed the real reasons and motives of the vocation, without however omitting the canonical formulae which are a fundamental requirement for their validity. (G&D I.12)

We appreciate prior contacts made with those close to the postulants, so as to get to know them better and for them to get to know the Congregation. Thereafter, once they have entered the formation house, it is quite normal for them to experience a cutoff or break from their family of origin, as a genuine call of the Gospel demands. (G&D I.13)

It is quite natural for a celebration to be organised on the occasion of an ordination to the priesthood or the profession of perpetual vows. What is unreasonable

is organising an excessive celebration for a lectorate, acolytate, a first profession or even a diaconate... The fact that the parish faithful or benefactors take charge of the preparations and bear the cost is still no good reason. In Betharram we freely make the choice of simplicity and austerity, including in sharing moments of joy, in order to better express our religious identity. (G&D I.14)

Materials should be prepared to better know and better understand the richness of our rule of life, in particular during the novitiate. The use of an assessment or evaluation tool has been proposed to check that this is being properly understood and taken on board by the young men in formation. (G&D I.15)

The language of the Congregation has always been French. However, nowadays the use of English is increasing as well as Spanish (and Portuguese also in Latin America). Some of us have also had to learn Italian. What language should we choose? Simple: another language than our own. We cannot deprive ourselves of the modern means of learning and acquiring language skills in a language other than our own. Henceforth all postulants to Betharram will learn another living language used by the Congregation. (G&D I.16).

I finish by assuring you of my brotherly affection and, full of hope like St Michael Garicoïts, I refer you to one of his favourite phrases on the matter of obedience: If you don't understand me, you'll have to guess (*Si vous ne me comprenez pas, vous me devinerez*). May God bless you! •



BÉTHARRAM  
FORMATION  
SERVICE

## GUIDELINES & DIRECTIVES ON FORMATION

### I.1 *use of psychological means*

The postulancy is a privileged moment in human formation. So that the candidates can live this moment of deep self-knowledge, a psychological test will be asked of each at the time of the postulancy, always with respect for the freedom of the individual. It will therefore not be asked only when difficulties are found, but to better know the candidate who will be welcomed. To prepare the candidates, it is necessary to facilitate the approach of psychological means by a prior meeting with a psychologist who will explain the importance of these means in training and self-knowledge (cf. Guidelines for the use of psychological skills in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood). To carry out this psychological test, one will follow the procedure formulated in the Ratio Fundamentalis at n ° 191-196.

### I.2 *admission to the postulancy*

The project of postulancy must be clear and well defined from the start. The responsible formator will have to be appointed and a precise budget will have to be established.

### I.3 *personal accompaniment*

As stated in VC § 66, personal accompaniment is not a fashion, but rather the principal instrument of formation. It must have a regularity and a precise frequency. The modalities of this accompaniment are indicated in the Ratio. The one who accompanies and the formator will follow formator's course; there will be time for evaluation and further study.

### I.4 *value of experience*

The candidate must take in formation as a journey made of life experiences, with moments of joy but also with difficult moments. It is necessary to link all the stages of formation, in making it clear what link unites them to each other. Each stage of formation has its importance: from the first to the last! It is necessary to prepare the

candidates to take the next step, in checking their suitability and understanding of the progressive goals. The service provided by the person responsible for each stage of formation must be valued and communication between those responsible for the various stages of formation must be encouraged.

*I.5  
formation of  
interiority*

It is fundamental to bring the person in formation to know what he is experiencing in his interiority (emotions, inner movements, feelings, desires ...). This interiority must be manifested by concrete external gestures. One must help the young in formation to develop a capacity for reading and understanding the material provided to them so that they can internalize and appropriate the values proposed throughout their formation. It is necessary to ensure, at each stage, a path of growth and emotional maturation of the person.

*I.6  
importance of the  
formation team*

It is essential that the formation team is involved in the decision to welcome and to send a candidate to the next stage of formation. A lively and continuous dialogue must be maintained between the regional superiors, the regional vicars and the formators through an annual meeting (RL 237a, b, c and 249). There must be a serious and deep dialogue between the regional superior and the person responsible for formation on a candidate's formation project. Communication between the different formators must be improved when young people in formation move from one stage to the next. For the evaluation of a young person in formation, the opinion of the entire formation team, the cultural and social context from which the candidate comes, must be taken into account. It is necessary that the formators work on a correct inculturation of the Ratio. This will allow a good internalization of the formation contents.

*I.7  
candidates come  
from other formation  
houses*

Young people who have made their first journey in formation houses or seminaries of Dioceses or other religious congregations could be welcomed with great attention. It is essential and necessary to have a written report of those who have followed their formation. Be-

fore welcoming the candidates in question into the formation community, it will be necessary to foresee a personal accompaniment to get to know them better.

*I.8  
external signs*

We must be clear about the use of external signs (clothing, liturgism...) which often reflect their internal weaknesses.

*I.9  
assume fully the general formation project*

The formators and the Superiors (Regional and Vicariate) must assume the integral formation project of the Congregation (Ratio) in its entirety: criteria, values, methods, guidelines. This is to avoid a lack of fulness and harmony in formation which can give way to improvisation. Towards this goal, a meeting could be organized with all the formators of the Congregation.

*I.10  
the mission of the formator*

The choice of future formators must provide a discernment between the Regional Superior (and his Council) and the General Superior (and his Council). In cases of necessity, due to the lack of formators, we will take into consideration the concrete possibility of asking a formator from another Vicariate / from another Region to go, for a given time, to the formation community which is in need of a formator. This will give the possibility to prepare a formator for the place in question. Formators should be prepared in time and care should be taken to ensure that they have the opportunity to live fully their experience before entering the formation community. Superiors must discern whether a religious has "the secret spring" of love to assume the service of formator.

*I.11  
specializations*

After perpetual profession, there must be at least three years of integration into a community in mission, before the start of the courses in order to be trained as a formator or for other specializations. This is to live fully and to mature in his vocation as a religious and a priest. The specialization will be chosen according to the mission of the Congregation. For the choice of these studies, a discernment will be made by the candidate and the major superiors.

In their "request/application" letters, candidates must

- I.12  
*presentation of  
“requests”/  
“applications”*
- clearly state the motivations that lead them to request to vows, to ministries or to ordinations. The formators will supervise the candidates in the formulation of the “requests” so that they contain the fundamental elements. Those responsible for formation will make sure to submit the complete file (as indicated in the appendices of the Ratio).
- I.13  
*contacts with families*
- It is important that the formators meet and know the families of the young people in formation. This helps to get to know the candidates better and promotes the participation of the parents themselves in the formation of their sons.
- I.14  
*the celebrations*
- For the first profession, for the ministries (readership and acolytat) and for the diaconate, the celebration and the festivities will have a family character and will take place in simplicity and sobriety (RdV 48), echoing our choice to follow a simple lifestyle. In the different stages of formation, the organization of the moments of celebration is the responsibility of the Congregation and the candidate. All the preparation and contribution must therefore be supervised and approved by the Congregation. We must avoid all type of disparity between religious.
- I.15  
*rule of life*
- That there must be an instrument for evaluating the knowledge of the RULE OF LIFE, especially at the end of the Novitiate, and this is to have a full and deeper understanding of the RL.
- I.16  
*foreign languages*
- It is necessary to learn a language of the Congregation during postulancy and noviciate.



## Holy Land, land of formation (3): the Interregional Canonical Noviciate

In the year in which we set out to «go out of ourselves, to go out, in community, for the mission», I come to share with you all the Project of the Congregation meant for our brothers, especially those who are on the peripheries of Betharram: the Interregional Canonical Noviciate “V. Fr Auguste Etchecopar” in Bethlehem, Vicariate of Holy Land.

It is the result of prayer, reflection and consultation with all the parts involved (direct collaborators, superiors, formators and the local community). With the necessary information we have carefully discerned the pros and cons of an important decision for the Congregation. The result is certainly a conviction, but it is also a great challenge.

### *Motivations for an interregional Noviciate*

•.. An interregional noviciate is a grace of God. It can be a privileged time for gathering the cultural diversities, the mix of generations and the various nationalities which shape the Congregation today, and which is going to be more significant in the future. •.. It makes it possible to rely on a formative community which has much experience and is particularly proper (*idoneus*) to communicate and live the Betharramite charism. It is a great help for the new generations who come from places where there are



no persons of reference with a long background: elder religious, missionaries, Betharramites educators, etc. We wish to form religious who love, think and build the future of the congregation and thus achieve greater continuity in the charismatic proposal.

•.. With a large and solid team, this stage of the noviciate can be given adequate contents and methods, pervaded with Betharramite identity. Avoiding all improvisation, counting on qualified religious who love to be sent on mission as formators and are mature. Responsible in the exercise of their work, they assume it freely, prioritizing it over other ministries. •.. Immigration status in India for Thai and Vietnamese foreigners has changed compared to what happened so far. VISAS for one year, in order to make the noviciate, will not be granted anymore for lack of a document that justifies the presence of foreigners for study reasons. This makes it now impossible to plan the regional noviciate in Bangalore.

### *Motivations for choosing the Holy Land*

• Our presence in the Holy Land, which is more than a century old, has a great value for the Congregation, from an ecclesial, historical, symbolic and strategic point of view. •.. Our contribution to the Patriarchate goes beyond the pastoral aspect. We are valued and loved by the testimony of the religious who came

before us, even though we are a small congregation. •.. A strong bond and shared responsibilities connect us to the Carmelite Sisters of Bethlehem and Nazareth. •.. We own a few properties of the Church, which are highly significant for the congregation: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Emmaus. With their special regime, these properties of the Holy Land are under the overall authority of the Superior General and his Council. •.. Novices and formators of the Saint Michael Garicoits Region who have made this experience in the past agree that the place offers exceptional possibilities to make the funding experience of the Charism and that it is very suitable for this stage of formation.

### *Fundamental features*

- It is the 360-day canonical novitiate, preceded by a brief period of adaptation. In the following years, this adaptation time will last longer. •.. To allow a better insertion into the reality of the Holy Land, it will be good to foresee a 14-month stay in the Holy Land. •.. Preparatory meetings (3/4 months earlier) will be held at the regional level or the vicariate level with the candidates to the novitiate. These meetings will include courses on society, culture and reality of the Holy Land; intensive courses on foreign languages to be used in the novitiate; and deepening the objectives of the novitiate through the Ratio. Responsibility for this preparation is entrusted to the Master of Postulants. •.. The candidates for the novitiate, who will arrive in the Holy Land, will live an initial period of in-

tegration among themselves to deepen their mutual knowledge, the purpose of the novitiate, the reality of the Holy Land, the pilgrimage to the sacred places, the in-depth study of foreign languages, the Community project of the Novitiate... •.. The novitiate is structured (according to the Ratio) around the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, the personal dialogue and the interiorization of the Rule of Life. The particular points of attention are: the inculturation of the faith and the theology of the consecrated life. •.. Contacts will be made with the local consecrated life and little apostolates will be carried out. •.. The rest of the apostolic novitiate will be made in the vicariate of origin (or, possibly, another).

### *Material & economical aspects*

#### *Juridical aspects*

- The House in Bethlehem has more than 24 rooms available. It is being adapted to receive the new community with the corresponding material and logistical preparations. • The financial support will come from the rents of the properties of the Holy Land and the cooperation of the Regions. • As it is an interregional Novitiate, the appointment of the novice master and his collaborator(s), as well as the project of the novitiate will remain under the direct authority of the Superior General and his Council.<sup>1</sup> ●●●

1) By virtue of Article 198 of the Rule of Life and as an exception to Articles 147, 148 and 244 § c. of the same. The corresponding decrees (Rule of Life 198) will be issued, valid until the next General Chapter.

## The Interregional Canonical Novitiate

“Venerable Fr. Auguste Etchecopar” in Bethlehem 2020/2021

*The Interregional Canonical Novitiate will begin this year, end 2020.*

*This experience will start with a multilingual training community: Fr. Stervin (English-French), Fr. Gaspar (French - Italian- Spanish- Portuguese), Fr. Firmin and Fr. Felet (fluent in several languages, including Arabic), as well as a varied and significant group of novices from around the world.*

*It will offer a good opportunity for an intercultural experience in view of the future Betharramite missionary and also for the practice of a foreign language; but above all, we have here the possibility of sharing the experience of God Love and the joyful testimony of religious life in community of each of its members. These are the essential elements in this stage of formation.*

*Our venerable third Superior General achieved so much for the Betharramite presence in the Holy Land that we would like to entrust to the project and ask him to help us live a fruitful rebirth in this reality.*

*Through the intercession of St. Mary of Jesus Crucified and of Fr. Etchecopar, may we be blessed by the Love of the Father in this project.*

*I ask Our Founder, St. Michael Garicoïts, to continue to teach us how to do God's will in everything!*

Fr. Gustavo Agín SCJ

SUPERIOR GENERAL



## Meeting life

with P. Tobia Sosio scj &amp; Monica Silvia Gadea

*"The disciple's joy serves as remedy for a world fearful of the future and overwhelmed by violence and hatred. The disciple's joy is not a feeling of selfish well-being, but a certainty that springs from faith, that soothes the heart and provides the ability to proclaim the good news of God's love. Knowing Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; that we have encountered Him is the best thing that has happened in our lives, and making him known by our word and deeds is our joy." (Aparecida 29)*

It is with these words that the bishops of Latin America, gathered in Aparecida in 2007, invited all pastoral agents to take up the challenge of the mission. Getting out of ourselves, overcoming natural resistance, allows us to experience how true the famous teaching of Jesus Christ is, as recalled by Saint Paul: *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."* (Acts 20, 35)

Each of us, religious or lay people, could bear witness to the great moments experienced by carrying out the mission entrusted to us. It is not so much accomplished works, nor journeys towards distant continents, but rather personal meetings, lived far from the tasks of daily life, which have given us the feeling of being *"fishermen of men."* Perhaps we have also had the opportunity, I



would even say the privilege, of going on a mission to distant lands, to people of another colour or another culture: Pope Francis is right to us remind that, *"those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others"* (EG. 10).

The analysis, presented in *Evangeli Gaudium* with the aim of showing the need for an authentic conversion within the Church itself, is real and worrying: *"The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ."* (EG. 2)

I am convinced that any sincere vocation to religious life or to secu-

lar commitment is a response to the One who calls to us to let go of mediocrity, individualistic sadness, and to feel enthusiasm in doing good.

The passage where the Gospel shows us the pedagogy of Jesus and the way in which he prepared his disciples through modest missions in the surrounding villages is a beautiful story (Mk 6: 30-32). When they returned, Jesus invited them to withdraw to a quiet place, perhaps to

consider all the manifestations of the love of God experienced in the mission and to give thanks. This could be an encouragement for our community meetings, to share the joys and difficulties of our apostolate, in particular missionary outings, which we all experience. I would like to share in these pages the testimony of Monica, professor at the Saint-Joseph college in Asunción, who is always ready to live missionary experiences:...



*... I am convinced that getting out of our selfish comfort, to share a little life with our brothers, should be part of our daily life. This is what Jesus did, what he wanted and what he continues to expect from us (Luke 10, 1-12. 17-20). Going out to go on a mission, not so much because others "need" us, but because "we need" others to enrich our existence;... to understand the world in which we live and encourage us to play our modest role, and maybe see the world around us improve.*

*I think as Christians we should declare ourselves as being on "permanent mission"; every day should be an opportunity to "go out and share a little slice of life": at home, on the street, at school, at work, in the market, throughout daily work.*

*We who love Bétharram are fortunate that the Congregation offers us, in many of its works (here, in Paraguay, and in other countries), these special occasions for the "Mission", like these outings to rural areas, which turn into meetings full of enthusiasm, prayer, joy, friendship, generosity, and where we all have the opportunity to share and learn. Since I came across Bétharram in the 80s, I have participated in its missions here in Paraguay; after facing realities very different from mine, I came back each time full of energy, with a great desire to continue working for a better, fairer, more fraternal country, where the rights of each person are truly respected; convinced of the great responsibility of a Christian: that of watching over the dignity of each human being ...*

*In 2019, I had the grace of being a missionary with my teaching colleagues and members of the administrative staff of the five Colleges*



Mission in Paraguay, in the rural area of Ñumi

of Paraguay, in the town of Ñumí (note: town about 200 km south of Asunción, in a agricultural region)...

I've already shared similar experiences with some of them. Others said it was the first time they had been encouraged to "go on a mission." There is a constant for all, I can say it without fear of being wrong, and it is the shock facing the social reality of our country, the material poverty (in all things) of our brothers: they lack everything, except Faith, because despite this great material deprivation, their faith remains intact, unalterable, solid. It is they who encourage us, challenge us, transmit to us this flame of Faith in the presence of God, with the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, this total confidence in God, which makes it so that, "even though I have nothing, God does not abandon me because I believe in Him." This same Faith which, for us missionaries, sometimes weakens, becomes almost imperceptible but it does not disappear, behind a multitude of things, in the midst of noise and emptiness ...

Our Saint Michael Garicoïts dreamed of a mobile taskforce: if as Bétharramites we are really committed and available to continue his work, we should assume the mission as a rule of life; work every day to realize this dream and say like him: Here I am, Lord. •




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**RL. 206a ... Superior of the community ...**

On 6 August (2019), the Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the appointment of Fr. Sylvain Dansou Hounkpatin as Superior of the Notre-Dame Community of Betharram (Vicariate of France-Spain, RSMG) for a first mandate from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020.

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**RL. ... Admission to postulancy ...**

During the Council meeting of 29 January 2020, Joseph pham Gia dung, Peter Le Ngoc Son and Francis-Xavier Tran Van Hong, three young Vietnamese, were admitted to the postulancy by the Superior General and his Council.

On February 4, 2020, the formation community of Bangalore, with Fr. Enrico Frigerio, Regional Superior, welcomed them in this new stage of formation together with 5 young Indians.

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**RL. 227 ... Regional Chapter ...**

On 27 February 2020, the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, granted, by way of derogation from Article 227 of the RL., authorized to replace the intermediate Regional Chapter of the San Michele garicoïts Region with an alternative proposal that will allow a listening of the base.

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**RL. 323-324 ... Dismissal of a member of the Congregation ...**

The decree of dismissal for Fr. Emmanuel Congo Winonga issued on 5 December 2019 by the Superior General, for illegitimate absence from the community, was confirmed on 20 December 2019 by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life.

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On 25 February, the Superior General sent an invitation to the **Session for the perpetual profession** in Betharram (24 June-29 July 2020) to the 11 participants hailing from the three Regions. These young brothers are: Serge Pacôme Appaouh, N'Dah Arnaud Kadjo, Djéban Landry Koffi, Christian Yao (Ivory Coast); Sergio Leiva (Paraguay) et Mariano Surace (Argentina); Peter Wichai Danainitikan, Thanit Panmanikun, Rawee Preemponwicha (Thailand) Anton Joshua Ponpondian, Akhil Joseph Thykkuttathil (India).

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**Directory 2020** The new directory (for internal use only), whose cover illustrates the theme of the year ~Go out, in community, meeting life and the many peripheries ~, is on the way to the communities of the Congregation. The copies (1 for each Regional and each Vicar; 1 for each residence; 2 for the formation communities) have already been handed over to the Vicariates of France-Spain, the Holy Land and Central Africa.

For the other vicariates, the copies will arrive by mail to the Vicars of the Region. We kindly ask them to make sure that each community and/or residence receives its copy.



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*In  
memoriam*

Our prayers join those of our brothers who have lost a dear one, like Fr Gilbert Coulibaly scj (of the Saint-Michel community of Bouar, Rep. of Central Africa), who lost his father, M. André Coulibaly Pegnon, on 30 January in Kalaguera (Ivory Coast).

On February 24rd, the brother of Fr Alberto Pensa SCJ, of the community of Ban Pong - Phayao (Vicariate of Thailand), Mr. Paolino Pensa, died suddenly at the age of 79, at Lierna (Italy).

On February 10, Mr Egidio Borghetti, brother of Fr Livio Borghetti SCJ, of the community of Albiate (Vicariate of Italy), passed away at the age of 94, in Rho (Milan - Italy).

February 8, from Santiago del Estero (Argentina), we received the sad news of the death of Fr. Gilbert Koffi Kouman, a priest from the Ivory Coast, formerly a Betharramite religious. He died of cardiac arrest. He was 54 years old. May he rest in peace!

## A school of the soul

IF THERE IS ONE DIMENSION OF FATHER ETCHECOPAR'S LIFE THAT HAS BEEN DEEPLY ILLUMINATED & TRANSFORMED BY HIS FAITH, IT IS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FAMILY! WHERE DO WE BEGIN WITH THIS STORY?



From the start, his focus was deep: *"O lend me your heart, dear father, dear sisters, to show him my gratitude less badly ... I hope that your tenderness will give me a little bit of this treasure of love without which our souls would be so languid and so sick."* (L97). One thing is obvious: there is a sharing of invisible riches; the family is the mysterious fabric of the communion of saints. It is a real springboard for everyone on the path to their vocation. As a religious he was quick to recognise what he had received: *"sensitivity so great in (our) family, (this) blood which boils, (this) heart which is stirred up..."* (L59). His vision of the couple is very original in this 19th century saint, a classic: *"but as you reflect one another in the picture you paint together"* he wrote to his father, *"you actually paint yourself. In this, it is the reflection of God who spreads over his creatures the beauty of his face, his trinity, his unity, his infinite love."* (L64). He has an extraordinary awareness of a union that continues after his mother's death. *"He is still there,"* wrote the religious to his brother, *preserving us in his person, and the reality of his paternal tenderness and the image of this maternal tenderness which flew off to Heaven...* (L73). There is nothing of human value that doesn't find its root in a spirit of faith: *"A God who descends*

*to the inner space of my heart to say to me: take courage, I struck you but I love you; I am your father ... I am your joy ... I will take the place of everything"* (L66) he wrote after the death of his mother to whom he was able to give communion ... *"she breathes at the Gate of heaven"* (L62). An ineffable peace, a consolation greater than his pain. And when his father exclaims: *"You have to submit to his will"*, a spiritual energy makes the son say: *"As this way of thinking and acting is simple ... superhuman. There he is, the man depending only on God ... nothing knocks him down; wealth does not inflate him, he receives everything as gift... sorrows... as orders... from the Good Father, to whom we must obey our hearts in everything, always at once"* (L50).

How then could Auguste not develop an original relationship at the heart of his siblings? There too, "something greater" is at work: first of all, being in the image of God, being his work (L30, 65, 92). With his sister Julie a nun, her consecrated heart is open: *"hold firm to the cross; wrap around it the left arm of humility and the right arm of confidence ..."* (L59). Julie truly embodies the ideal of religious life. Later, he will recognise: *"although in a manner of speaking I see you every day in the heart of our divine Master... you are almost as present to me as if I saw you in*

the flesh, and although silent, I hear the sound not only of your words but of your actions, your thoughts ... (all this) is a fire that warms us, but is also a mirror which shows us the truth ... without doubt you know me in him, as I know you ... holy society... blessed communion... "(L594).

To his brother Maxime, who left when very young for Argentina, he wrote: "I know you as little more than an 11 or 12-year-old little brother; but I have this portrait in my heart ... " (L38). Admittedly, contact is rare: "I hardly find a minute for dear Maxime, he also cannot find one ..." (L679 to his sisters). The ideal of life left by their father (L46), is for Auguste the opportunity to send best wishes to his brother: "I do not know if the Good Lord wants you to be a millionaire ... what should be desired more (especially when this money has cost so much fatigue)... is that it be a school for the soul... "(L17). "Always be the docile child of the Heavenly Father, fulfilling his wishes with ... spiritual joy ... complete surrender!" (L149). A joy at its height during his visit to Argentina in 1891-2. It was present from the start "I am inundated with consolation at seeing the feelings of your heart ..." (L136); via the figure of his brother, sometimes entangled in money matters, he discovers the ideal of the Christian



in the world: "In you, everything is deep satisfaction for me... your heart is fixed on what is good before the God of love, your gaze still fixed on heaven... "(L156). With his sister Madeleine, the brother will also forge a unique relationship: she becomes "servant of my apostolate" (L321), source of spiritual assistance. Having remained single with his father, the religious brother indicates to her the way of a consecration: "you are therefore happy in the cradle of your vocation! ... May your divine Saviour lead you himself in the solitude of perfect detachment, let him speak to your heart ... and let yourself be led ... like his poor servant ... thank him a thousand times ... Lord, what do you want me to do? ... Finally, behold the handmaid of the Lord. "(L51, 350).

Like an "invisible cloister", the union of their hearts is a source of deep dynamism: "I am convinced that you are for your brother a source of light, of strength, of comfort"... (L593); "Continual (are) the visits that my memory makes to you." (L621, see 350). "Let us continue to walk together, side by side, along the path of the poor life ..." (L649). "Happy because you have believed and you still believe and hope in the love of the One who chose you and who is your portion." (L247)

#### References : Letters (L)

17 to his brother Evariste, 02/04/1854 , 30 to his mother, 13/08/1860 , 38 to his brothers Séverin and Maxime, 17/01/1862 , 46 to his brother Séverin, 20/11/1863 , 50 to his brothers Evariste, Séverin e Maxime, 30/03/1864 , 51 to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 1864 , 59 idem, 31/07/1865 , 62 idem, 10/12/1865 , 64 idem, non date , 65 to his father, 26/01/1866 , 66 to his brother Evariste, 18/02/1866 , 73 idem, 21/11/1866 , 92 to his brothers Evariste, Séverin and Maxime, 3/10/1868 , 97 to his father, 28/03/1869 , 136 to his brother Maxime, 2/12/1871 , 149 idem, 3/01/1873 , 156 idem, 17/03/1873 , 247 to his sister Julie..., 16/05/1876 , 321 to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 21/05/1877 , 350 to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 8/10/1877 , 593 to his sister Madeleine, 5/09/1881 , 594 to his sister Julie..., 5/09/1881 , 621 to his sister Madeleine, 6/03/1882 , 649 idem, 5/09/1882 , 679 to his sisters Madeleine and Marceline, 6/05/1883



## 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?•••*



• Father Angelo Recalcati SCJ

It is certain that Saint Michael was a man of government. He knew how to advise his religious, both when they needed directions to properly direct their ministries, and when they needed to be encouraged or spurred on. He did not accept that their limits and faults would destabilise them and did not accept that they allow themselves to be conditioned by problems, or by insubordinate or problematic religious. From this point of view, Father Pierre Barbé is one of the religious to whom he has written the most. Father Barbé would become very important for the Congregation and the right hand of Father Etchécopar. Father Garicoits himself placed him at the head of the work at Orthez, despite his lack of experience and his fragile nature. Saint Michael had to “form” him as a superior, by his advice, his indications and even by energetic fraternal corrections.

One of these letters is letter no. 258. Moncade was in a deplorable situation and was in danger of closing. Some took advantage of the young

superior's inexperience to create a confusion that would work to their advantage (see Letter 257).

In letter 258, Saint Michael gives Father Barbé advice which, despite the different epoch and situation, offers us current counsel that can help us today in our work:

So;

1. *Unite yourself as much as possible to God and Our Lady either in prayer or in each of your actions to obtain from the source of all good, a large share in his gifts and graces for yourself and your community and much power and effectiveness for all the ways which you are using to help these poor, and good souls.*

2. *Redouble your efforts to be a man of example, principalem who makes love towards your neighbour and towards the community, and may true humility shine through you in all its splendour, so that you are pleasing in the eyes of God and men. When you concentrate on yourself, believe me, you are not pleasing to the good Lord and you make people fearfully concerned! Can you tell me if this is a natural result of your personality! It is an evil business. So stop making yourself miserable; you have everything to gain by making yourself aware of this.*

3. *Be free of all impulses and all disorderly affections.*

4. *Be welcoming and kind to all; firm but not inflexible, without any kind of misplaced severity.*

5. *Corde magno et animo volenti! in doing the will of God. Be on the watch against your excruciating and everlasting hesitancy. Show more drive and courage in holding out against your own weakness and that of others.*

6. *Be watchful and caring at the start of works, be vigorous in bringing them to their conclusion, not leaving them sketchy and unfinished through negligence, slackness or obsessions.*

7. *In relations with those outside the community, be brief. Have no relationships contrary to the rules or any unhelpful ones, etc...*

*So set to work! I will pray for you every day at Mass.*



11 March 2020 : After having been able to meet the religious of the communities of Rome-Monteporzio and Pistoia (see the picture above), the Superior General had to suspend his canonical visit to the Vicariate of Italy because of the drastic and restrictive provisions taken by the Italian government on the whole national territory to combat the coronavirus emergency.



*Rome, piazza del popolo, Thursday 12 March 2020 at 10 am*



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