

In this issue

“Walking together”, a good way to share joy p. 1

Address in Bratislava p. 4

Signed Etchecopar p. 6

Roundtable event in the birthplace p. 7

From the Sacred Heart Mission Desk p. 10

The “FVD Group”, always ahead p. 12

Notices from the General Council p. 16

Dc. Thanit & Dc. Rawee, along the way p. 17

† Fr. Giuseppe Lietti scj p. 20

† Fr. Giovanni Duca scj p. 22

Prayer for the Synod 2021-2023 p. 24

A word from the superior general

“Walking together”, a good way to share the joy

Whoever listens to you listens to me (Lk 10.16)

Dear Betharramites,

Christians have begun to walk a path towards the Synod of 2023. Indeed, the Church calls us to walk together. It is an opportunity for us to reflect and join the pilgrimage that gathers the past, contemplates the present and discerns the future path to travel.

The consultation of the entire People of God is a transcendent event, because that “People” participate in the prophetic function of Christ. The Pope reminds us that we must listen to each other more, and stop focusing on hungering for power and maintaining heavy or obsolete structures that stifle the Spirit. By taking responsibility for ourselves, we want the Truth of the Gospel to emerge from our meeting spaces, Jesus Christ, the source of all discernment.

Synodality is not a buzzword. But it has its roots in the way of life of the first Christian communities. It implies opening new spaces. It requires a profound change of mentality, a *metanoia* (conversion), which leads to a new expression of communion

in Christ, because it is the fruit of the action of the Spirit who lives and speaks in us, in our communities, in each one.

The religious of Betharram already have spaces of synodality. Our constitutions express differentiated roles in the service of authority and animation of the communities, but also spaces of communion and participation. Yet, I think we are not used to discerning together, before making decisions that, on the other hand, must be legitimate. One of these spaces is the Assembly held in each Vicariate (Rule of Life 273). Synodality is also expressed in the so-called "consultations" to appoint the superior of the community, and in those carried out to designate the major superiors, and their regional vicars. Although these are not binding, they suggest that everyone can express themselves. All fully professed religious participate in the appointment of delegates to the Regional Chapter. A scholastic delegate is invited to it, and by custom even retired bishops who live among us (though without active or passive voice) plus lay people or experts. The value that the Rule of Life gives to "everybody", in order to nominate "a few" and finally "the one", is an expression of synodality, it allows us to listen and walk together. For this, it is essential that each superior well grasps his role, which is that of MINISTER ... meaning SERVANT. Without clarity in this concept, the whole synodal process is diluted by good intentions.

Rediscovering what the Holy Spirit is saying today to us through the Church (Rev 3.22) is an invitation to value each other more, in order to better discern together and listen to the Holy Spirit. I have felt, at times, the demand for greater participation among us, but we must know that this requires a harmony of faith, to believe together and above all to want to walk together. What matters most is the willingness to listen to everyone, dialogue and then decide on the basis of our religious identity.

Pope Francis has long been proposing to all the faithful the missionary option, the option for the poor. He now places his accent on *an outgoing synodal Church*, converted by listening, which breaks with excessive verticality and generates a new balance, in which all the components have an important and active part. It is appropriate to remember here that there is no charismatic Church that is opposed to the hierarchical Church. But, unfortunately, in some sectors one can see how much a kind of "*hierarchology*" (Yves Congar) has developed in the Church that tries to stay above the People of God. The present process leads to a profound ecclesial change: *inserting the hierarchy within the context of the People of God*. Isn't that what the Second Vatican Council asked of us when it spoke of renewal?

Every minister, as we said, is called to play his part and to be a servant (first meaning of the word "minister"). The charism of authority unites and

does not separate; It comes from on High (from the Holy Spirit), although it is the basis of everything. What is being sought in the Church today is that we have an associative and fruitful contribution from all the baptised. St. Michael Garicoits proposed to his followers: *"It is this inner Master that must be listened to, it is under his guidance that one must be placed"* (DS § 129). Indeed, the anointing by the Holy Spirit teaches the community of the faithful about all things (cf LG 12). Listening to each other is a way of remaining in the Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 2:20,27).

Thus, a synodal path will lead us to *learn* from each other. A servant Church will not nullify the modes through which, surely, the Church will continue to lead, but will enhance its true mission, which is service. The scandals experienced due to abuses committed by some ministers of the Church today accelerate the call for discernment, to avoid repeating mistakes of the past and uncritically sustain the systemic problems that facilitated them (clericalism, abuse of power and conscience).

In this Church, the laity are not mere recipients, but subjects of faith, with unique and irreplaceable contributions. And in fact this participation of laity, women, young people, etc., will not diminish the consciousness of the faith, the foundation of Christian truth, the unity of the Church and its connection with the Pope.

The whole Church must be transformed for the evangelisation of

the world today, rather than for self-preservation.

Finally, the growing "diversity" in the Church is not a coincidence, it is not something we have to "put up with". If we look at the first Christian communities we will see that *diversity* is wanted, intended, sought by the Spirit of God. In them, the Will of God does not arise by chance, it is expressed in a choral way, in various languages. (cf Rev 7.9)

Diversity can be a source of tension between us. This tension should not be despised, nor should it be avoided at all costs. If we seek to *walk together*, it will be a *creative tension*, which cannot be eliminated, because it is part of the pilgrimage. Those of us who lead have the great mission of ensuring that it is not divisive (which it sometimes is), ensuring that everyone listens to each other and puts themselves in the same perspective of Jesus: and "give our lives" for each other. There are always "special graces" that are poured out on each and every one (cf. LG 12).

Ultimately, we must know that the leadership of the Spirit is at stake, and that is why it is so important to be a part of and want to build synodality together.

I hope that as a religious family we cordially accompany this synodal process that will involve everyone. *Walking together* will always be, for a Betharramite, a good way to share joy.

Fr. Gustavo scj
Superior General

Address for the meeting with bishops, priests, religious, seminarians and catechists, Saint Martin Cathedral (Bratislava), 13 September 2021



What we need most of all [is] a Church that can walk together, that can tread the paths of life holding high the living flame of the Gospel. The Church is not a fortress, a stronghold, a lofty castle [...]. [It] is a community that seeks to draw people to Christ with the joy of the Gospel. [...] The Church must be humble, like Jesus, who stripped himself of everything and made himself poor in order to make us rich (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). That is how he came to dwell among us and to care for our wounded humanity.

How great is the beauty of a humble Church, a Church that does not stand aloof from the world, viewing life with a detached gaze, but lives her life within the world. Living within the world means being willing to share and to understand people's problems, hopes and expectations. [...] We need to become immersed in the real lives of people and ask ourselves: what are their spiritual needs and expectations? What do they expect from the Church? It is important to try to respond to these questions. For me, three words come to mind.

The first is freedom. Without freedom, there can be no true humanity, for human beings were created free in order to be free. [...] Whenever freedom was attacked, violated and suppressed, humanity was disfigured and the tempests of violence, coercion and the elimination of rights rapidly followed.

Freedom is not something achieved

automatically, once and for all. No! It is always a process, at times wearying and ever in need of being renewed, something we need to strive for every day. It is not enough to be free outwardly, or in the structures of society, to be authentically free. Freedom demands personal responsibility for our choices, discernment and perseverance. [...] So often times nowadays we do what the media decide we should do. In this way, we lose our freedom. Let us reflect, though, on the history of the people of Israel: they suffered under the tyranny of the Pharaoh, they were slaves and then the Lord set them free. Yet to experience true freedom, not simply freedom from their enemies, they had to cross the desert, to undertake an exhausting journey. Then they began to think: "Weren't we better off before? At least we had a few onions to eat..." This is the great temptation: better a few onions than the effort and the risk involved in freedom. [...]

Sometimes in the Church too this idea can take hold. Better to have everything readily defined, laws to be obeyed, security and uniformity, rather than to be responsible Christians and adults who think, consult their conscience and allow themselves to be challenged. [...] In the spiritual life and in the life of the Church, we can be tempted to seek an ersatz peace that consoles us, rather than the fire of the Gospel that unsettles and

transforms us. [...] Yet a Church that has no room for the adventure of freedom, even in the spiritual life, risks becoming rigid and self-enclosed.

A second word [...] is creativity. [...] The joy of the Gospel is always Christ, but the routes that this good news travels through time and history can be different. [...] Together, Cyril and Methodius traversed this part of the European continent and, burning with passion for the preaching of the Gospel, they even invented a new alphabet for the translation of the Bible, the liturgy and Christian doctrine. They thus became the apostles of the faith's inculturation in your midst. They invented new languages for handing on the Gospel; they were creative in translating the Christian message; and they drew so close to the history of the peoples they encountered that they learned their language and assimilated their culture. [...] Isn't this perhaps the most urgent task facing the Church [...] finding new "alphabets" to proclaim the faith? We are heirs to a rich Christian tradition, yet for many people today, that tradition is a relic from the past; it no longer speaks to them or affects the way they live their lives. Faced with the loss of the sense of God and of the joy of faith, it is useless to complain, to hide behind a defensive Catholicism, to judge and blame the evil world. No! What we need is the creativity of the Gospel. [...] What a fine thing it is when we find new ways, means and languages to proclaim the Gospel!

[...] Cyril and Methodius did exactly this, they were open to this new creativity, and they teach us that the Gospel cannot

grow unless it is rooted in the culture of a people, its symbols and questions, its words and its very life. [...]

Freedom, creativity, and finally, dialogue. A Church that trains people in interior freedom and responsibility, one able to be creative by plunging into their history and culture, is also a Church capable of engaging in dialogue with the world, with those who confess Christ without being "ours", with those who are struggling with religion, and even with those who are not believers. It is not a cluster of special people. It dialogues with everyone: believers, those living lives of holiness, those who are lukewarm and those who do not believe. It speaks to everyone. It is a Church that, in the footsteps of Cyril and Methodius, unites and holds together East and West, different traditions and sensibilities. A community that, in proclaiming the Gospel of love, makes it possible for communion, friendship and dialogue to flourish between believers, between the different Christian confessions and between peoples.

Unity, communion and dialogue are always fragile, especially against the backdrop of a painful history that has left its scars. The memory of past injuries can breed resentment, mistrust and even contempt; it can tempt us to barricade ourselves against those who are different. Wounds, however, can always turn into passages, openings that, in imitating the wounds of the Lord, allow God's mercy to emerge. That grace changes our lives and makes us artisans of peace and reconciliation. [...] ●●●

Father Etchecopar to Father Prosper Chirou

Fr. Prosper Chirou scj (nephew of the Superior General, Fr. Jean Chirou, who died in 1873), recipient of the letter, had just been appointed superior of the Bethlehem residence, a new community opened in May 1879.

F.V.D.

Betharram, July 14, 1879

Dear Father Chirou,

Fr. Abadie tells me that your health is good; you can see what I have said to him. When you are over worked, do not be afraid to make use of this dear secretary. Currently you are heavily involved in the building works. May Our Lady support you! May she fill you with the wisdom to build well, in the Lord and for the Lord, temporally and spiritually: she will do it.

The ideal is to bring together in the new residence the practical and the spiritual; so that the health of the body is sustained without the health of the soul or spiritual discipline being undermined.

Another principle of administration is not to allow the first flush of enthusiasm for a ministry to carry you away; you must weigh up the burdens against your current strengths and also the strengths – or should I say the weaknesses – to come; you should accept and allow only those ministries that are easy to leave to others, bearable not only for us, but for those who will come after us. Otherwise, they will have to start again from square one.

Finally, an important point: it is with prudence that you should show yourselves to the outside world, especially towards ecclesiastical authority and other religious communities. Show a confident deference and a respectful confidence; a charity without exclusion; a zeal without jealousy; a gentle patient and persevering humility; finally a discretion which flavours all your words and all your steps.

With this, you will all be a beautiful crown, a source of ineffable joys for both heaven and earth!

It will be so; for you are all men of goodwill.

Dear Father 'be prepared in season and out of season... with great patience and careful instruction'.¹

May Our Lady bless you.

All yours

Etchecopar

1) 2 Tim. 4,2

Roundtable event in the birthplace

In this Year of Fr Auguste Etchecopar, the Community of Religious of the Sacred Heart of Betharram at Saint-Palais organised an evening roundtable event centred on the life of the Venerable Auguste Etchécopar, with the help of the “Association of the Friends of Michael Garicoits”¹.

This talk was held at 8 p.m. on Thursday 22 July in the HITZ ARGI Parish Room in Saint-Palais. The Parish Priests had announced it at masses the previous weekend and more than fifty people attended what was a most happy event.

We took advantage of the presence of two of the Fathers from Saint-Palais who were holidaying in our midst, Fr Beñat Oyhénart and Fr Philippe Hourcade, who are both very knowledgeable on the life of the

1) Founded in 1953, the aims of the Association of Friends of Saint Michael Garicoits are to perpetuate the memory of Michael Garicoits. It is in charge of the maintenance of various places (Garacotchéa, the Church of Ibarre, the “shelter of the pilgrim”, etc.) and of the organization of the pilgrimage as well as activities of animation aimed at cultivating the veneration of our founder.

Mr. Pierre Borda

Head of the Association
“Les Amis de Michel
Garicoits”



Venerable Father, a native of Saint-Palais. They gave us a clear and informative presentation on the different stages of his life, highlighting his personality and spirituality through his correspondence.

A few notes, piecemeal:

***B**orn in Saint-Palais on May 30th, 1830 and baptised two days after. His father was the post master at Saint-Palais and his mother stayed at home looking after the family. The couple had fifteen children in all, but experienced the sorrow of losing five to childhood diseases which medical science of the day was unable to cure. Devoted parents, they brought their children up*

together, inculcating in them true Christian moral values.

Auguste was a dynamic, sensitive and impulsive boy, but thanks to the education he received from his parents and school-teacher, he managed to get the better of his tempera-



ment. Primary school, then high school, he continued his school education at Aire-sur-Adour and gained his school leaving certificate (baccalauréat) at the age of 17. He had heard the call of God even at this young age and had been contemplating entering the seminary, but the Bishop of Bayonne gave him a dispensation and instead sent him to Saint-Palais to teach maths. After a year's experience with members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross at Oloron, he was ordained priest in Bayonne on June 10th, 1854.

In the summer of 1855, he made the acquaintance of St Michael Garicoits in Betharram and discovered his ideal of a consecrated life; St Michael Garicoits appointed him novice master at only 27 years of age. Every morning for the next eight years, before the novices had their lessons, Father Auguste had a daily chat with St Michael, followed by a time of prayer and meditation before the tabernacle. Convinced of his intense spiritual life, St Michael entrusted him with preaching during retreats held for the teachers and pupils at the Convent in Igon, run by the Daughters of the Cross.

Auguste conscientiously took down notes at each of the Saint's lectures and, thanks to information given in confidence, we also know that St Michael was sure he had received the gift of charism from the Holy Spirit to found the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Auguste

The Talents of Fr Auguste Etchecopar

*A spiritual life based on trust in
and abandonment to God*

Joyous humility

Evangelising gentleness

Attentive charity

remained in Betharram for some forty years; assistant general, secretary general, then in August 1874 he was elected superior general following the death of Father Chirou. He played an active part in drawing up the constitutions and, in spite of opposition, succeeded in getting these approved by Rome. A great builder, he carried out many alterations and developments in Betharram and oversaw construction of the college chapel.

Father Etchecopar wrote many letters,

to his family and to his communities in France and Latin America. In poor health and tired from his labours, he passed away at the age of 67 on April 13th, 1897, having accomplished three great works: the approval of Betharram and its constitutions by the Holy See; recognition by the Church of Michael Garicoits' holiness; and the spiritual and material consolidation of the Congregation and its works.

Fr Etchecopar was very open to the problems of his day, of a generous heart, very caring towards little ones, the poor and above all his own people; he was also very attached to his family and corresponded a lot with his brothers who had emigrated to Argentina with his sisters.

Saint Michael was like a father and model to him; he would often climb up to The Calvary, prostrate himself before it and pray before the tomb of Father Garicoits, entrusting to him the people and



important matters of the Congregation. He was a man of God, spending much time before the Blessed Sacrament and even in carrying out his everyday tasks, he always did so in union with Christ.

Before closing the evening's proceedings, some questions were asked by the audience, especially about the status of Fr Etchecopar's beatification: the first stage of beatification has not yet been validated, but the cause, suspended in 1997, is being taken up once more this year, with a new postulator and the submission of new documents and testimonies.

Many thanks to Beñat and Philippe for having agreed to share their knowledge with us and to have led this round-table about this little- or even unknown native of Saint-Palais. Even though the name Etchécopar is in regular use, particularly in the context of a school environment (Cours Etchécopar, Ecole Etchecopar, Collège Etchécopar, Maison Etchécopar), the name has been in frequent use for decades, but who really knows

about this man, born on the Rue du Palais-de-Justice in Saint-Palais?

It is up to us to identify ways and means of bringing more people to know him: children, young people and the population of the area as a whole and indeed, the wider general public: at school, through catechesis, in the press, why not a weekly column about him in the local newspapers?

Personally I have discovered what is perhaps a future saint, with many similarities to St Michael Garicoits: the same early call to the vocation of the priesthood and then to the religious life, the same love for kith and kin, the same spirit of obedience and the same intense spiritual life. Truly one can see the work of the Holy Spirit in them both.

His piety should be our model and guide along our way and further in our trust in God. Perhaps his very rich spiritual life will promote vocations among our young people. It is my dearest wish!! ●●●

From the Sacred Heart Mission Desk

"Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for His people" said, Pope Francis. This was the inspiration to start Sacred Heart Mission Center in the Vicariate of England. It was when Betharram extended her branches looking for new mission possibilities in the South Asia especially in India, the English Province was invited to pioneering in building up formation and mission in India. Thanks to Bro. Michael Richard SCJ for working tirelessly for the new mission projects in India, may his soul rest in peace. Following the great example Br. Michael set before us, we in the Vicariate work passionately to find resources to support formation of young seminarians and mission in India.

We conduct various fundraising events in our SCJ parishes collectively and individually; such as sponsored walks, coffee mornings, mission appeals and other parish events, etc. Thanks to our Fathers and Brothers for promoting mission awareness in our own parishes. Mission appeals are the major source for our mission fund which brings at least 60% of the finances and we remain grateful to the English Vicariate for topping up with fund over this. We are part of an es-



P. George Mathew Korandakkatte scj, (Superiore della comunità di Droitwich)
è procuratore delle missioni nel Vicariato d'Inghilterra

tablishment called *Catholic Mission Union* (CMU) for England and Wales, which organise and allocate parishes to religious orders and missionary organizations for mission appeals in various dioceses in the country. From the Vicariate both Fathers and Brothers visit those parishes allocated to us and we make use of these visits to speak about our Congregation and our Betharramite Missions, also we take this a chance to do vocation promotions in the parishes too. The mission appeal visits are always uplifting and an encouragement for us because the people are always very hospitable and keen on knowing about our Congregation and the Missions. On those visits, some of us were surprised to meet people who had been to Betharram during their visit in Lourdes .



The pandemic has affected badly our mission appeals and other events, because we could not visit parishes for the last two years. We are fortunate to have groups of dedicated Companions of Betharram in our parishes who were a great support to us especially in this unprecedented time. We are always indebted to them for their love and care for our missionaries and our mission works. This also makes us to realise how important it is for us to involve

more like-minded laypeople in our parishes and mission centers to be part of our Betharramite mission and to cultivate the passion for Jesus and for His people. As Mission Procurator I thank all my confrères and people for all the support.

Fr. George Mathew scj

Community of Droitwich



The “FVD Group”, always ahead

On September 14, in the city of Asunción, Paraguay, we celebrated the 18th Anniversary of the founding of the FVD Group. Composed of lay Betharramites, the group was founded on September 14. Seven young lay people met on a Sunday afternoon, encouraged by Mrs. Elena Ibáñez de Careaga and with the spiritual accompaniment of (the late) Fr. Emiliano Jara Medina, scj. They sought to deepen the charism proposed by St Michael Garicoits and to encourage Betharramite pastoral care. They managed to build what for many young people today is a home and a place of encounter with Christ.

Each year, one more anniversary of community life, calls us to deep reflection and inner listening that allows us to discern where we come from and where we are going. It seems an existentialist and abstract phrase, but, as the late Fr. Jara would put it: “*Gratitude is the hallmark of a good spiritual life.*” This group has received so much fruitfulness and love and graces by walking together in this Group of Life.

From the moment of its foundation, the FVD Group has had to face and adapt to numerous changes and needs of Church and Society. People eager to know and find Christ, manifested that desire by demanding spaces that allowed encounter: retreats, missions, apostolates, etc. Because of them the

FVD Group opened a pathway to all those who wanted to find help to follow Christ, through the Betharramite charism.

In these 18 years, we have always tried to share with others the joy of knowing Christ, offering the right context for the particular stage of life of the people who came to the group. For those who wanted to integrate, they planned how to organise communities and organise activities so that young people could grow. Thus the group opened up, accepting boys and girls from Colegio San José, university students, professionals and married couples.

As limited, fearful and imperfect people, we can be tempted to measure success with inappropriate yardsticks and think that the value of a Christian Group lies in the number of members it has, how many spiritual retreats it organises, how many core communities function, how many spiritual missions or other pastoral activities have been carried out over 18 years.

But I have been in the FVD group since 2008 and though I have often been side-tracked by these illusions, I have discovered that the ongoing community witness of all the members of yesterday and today shows us that the true evaluation criteria are: the gift of faith and the testimonies of those who perceive the presence of God at



work in their life. These things are what confirm that the FVD Group belongs to God and not to human beings.

There are many people who experienced God's love for the first time, many families healed, many members of various age ranges: from 16 to 40 years old and many marriages that have been formed between members of the FVD Group. These couples today are families with children, who from the womb are assimilating the values of the Gospel and the Betharramite charism.

Alongside this, many young people have discovered different pathways of life and have engaged in a serious project of spiritual life. This shows us that the Gospel is incarnated and bears fruit among its members, among families and people who were directly and indirectly evangelised during these years.

Once, Saint Michael Garicoits met the God of love and mercy, while taking

care of the sheep on the steep mountains of the Pyrenees in the remote village of Ibarre. That reveals to us that for the love of God there is no geographical limit, no limit of circumstance, social condition, state of life or any other kind of barrier. We can discover Him and meet Him wherever he wants to show us his love and his fullness. In the FVD Group we have discovered the source of that deep encounter of God within each person: love is the secret spring that moves the world. The main legacy of our Holy Founder is to show us the path of availability, the permanent disposition to meet Christ wherever he wants, giving ourselves with trust to the God of love to transform our lives, avoiding ideologies, prejudices, complications or human efforts.

Each anniversary raises questions for the future, paths to be taken, objectives to be achieved. The superior of the FVD Group, proposes possible paths to follow: how to adapt to the

growth of the members, how to best use the talents and skills of the older members for mission, how to best harness the enthusiasm and youth of the younger communities, always keeping to the path so that everyone can find the love of God and a formation in our shared faith.

A joy that I had in these two years at the service of the FVD Group was that we were able to find communion with the Betharramite religious so as to be able to share. United to them by Christ we have felt accompanied by them and committed to one other in seeking to act upon the will of God without reservation, without delay, without looking back, out of love more than for any other reason. Only with the eyes of faith can we discover and be assured that it is the Holy Spirit who encourages and guides us with his breath and with his fire. And this is what he is bringing to birth in the FVD Group, embracing some members in love, committing them to a family, a job and activities to help those most in need. But also the Spirit asks us to keep our eyes on the signs of the times in both Church and society.

In his perspective on the future André* tells us this: "Many times, the members of the FVD Group are asked how we see the future, and I will try to outline an answer. The path of personal and community mystery to which God has called us must be lived, experienced and worked out in a practical way. If we ask the founding members

how they saw the future at that time, each one would tell of their conviction and vision of the future that the FVD Group should have. Today the perspective is different, we are surprised that many of the things that we are experiencing now, we had not predicted. We have discovered that the Holy Spirit works in the members of the group, inspiring and encouraging the path of the FVD Group according to the Gospel. The future of FVD is found in each member who offers their witness, their sacrifices and their time to the work, in love and preaching offered in spiritual retreats. It is to be found in those works, hardly visible or worthwhile in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God worth as much as the widow's mite related in the Gospel (Luke 21.4).

One never knows if one's contribution (from a gospel perspective whether offered with love, or from a lukewarm or dry spirit), affects eternity or remains in the ambition and pride of the person. In the same way, God alone is in charge of transforming bad into good.

There is no doubt that the future is built upon each member's gesture of love that is given for one's brother, the participation in the life of each community, each Eucharistic celebration, and spiritual witness that each member gives personally and collectively.

I do not believe in a great and messianic future of the FVD Group, I only wish with all my heart for a progressive growth in "wisdom, stature and grace" (Lk 2:52). The future is built on the per-

severance of today, on current duties, announcing and proclaiming the Gospel, identifying community needs, immersed in the signs of our times and of the Church. The FVD Group must form itself into a pastoral 'marriage' - familial and professional, which emerges from the states of life and experiences of its members, aiming to live the Christian faith in a heroic way, within the situation of their own state of life, overcoming the lukewarmness that continually constitutes a serious threat to a responsible life.

I recommend leaving everything else in the hands of a Provident God. Reaching these goals implies a spiritual process that begins with a call from God, continues with discipleship and culminates in being a missionary. St Michael Garicoits summed it up in three steps: "*Suitable, detached and open.*" For that, a continuous discernment must be carried out: discovering

God's plan. The main characteristic of a Community are and will always be: knowing God's plan and living it together. "

From all the above, I see in the FVD Group the grace of God, poured out in each of the people that compose it and in the steps that we have taken, right or wrong, from which we were able to learn and continue to focus on what is most important: experiencing God's love and sharing it with others. That is why I consider that one of the main challenges for the FVD Group will be to continue deepening its discernment in prayer and following Christ. Thus we may be able to know his will and adapt to new needs inside and outside of the group, so that imitating St Michael Garicoits, we can continue to devote our life and energy to fulfilling God's will for each one of us.

May these 18 years of FVD Group allow us to experience the past with mercy, the present with love, and a future entrusted to the Providence of God. Amen.

César Bogado

(Head of the FVD Group)

***André**

Balansa (Member of the FVD Group)



Meetings of the General Council, end September and early October 2021. The Superior General, with his Council...:



- approved the ***appointment of Fr. Pascal Ravi as Novice Master*** (Extraordinary Novitiate in India) for two years, starting from 1 October 2021;
- approved the ***appointment of Fr. Arul Gnana Prakash as Superior of Community of Mangalore*** (Vicariate of India, Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region) for a first term, starting from 1st October;
- ***extended the mandate of the Novice Masters, Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi Ayo and Fr. Luke Kriangsak Kitsakunwong*** for the Extraordinary Vicariate Novitiates, respectively in Ivory Coast and in Thailand.

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On the agenda: The next Council of the Congregation will be held by videoconference from 15 to 19 November 2021.

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Feasts & celebrations:

After the celebration scheduled for June 12 has been postponed to an indefinite date due to health restrictions and prolonged Lockdown in Thailand, the ***priestly ordinations of deacons James Thanit Panmanikun and Peter Rawee Prempoonwicha*** have finally been announced for this Saturday, October 16 in Chiang Mai.

On the eve of their ordinations, we can join them in the following pages offering the reflection they sent us in June about their experience, from the religious profession to the diaconal ministry.

Let us give thanks for this moment of communion and joy with our Thai brothers and with the whole Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region.

Fr. Thanit e Fr. Rawee, along the way



**Deacon Thanit
Panmanikun scj**
Community of Maepon

To begin with, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on my spiritual journey. After taking my final vows, I have strongly felt God's love and support for me to find my purpose in life – to serve God as a priest. The journey from final vows until today has been one of great joy and fulfilment. However, it has not always been perfect. There has been challenges too in my mission in Maepon, which I have had to overcome, not by myself, but with God by my side. Reflecting on these challenges has helped me to further grow my love for God and feel an even stronger sense of purpose to become a priest.

Since taking my final vows, my mission has been in 'Maepon'. Maepon is a place of great significance for the Northern-Thai catholic community. In the past, and until today, Maepon has been the centre of Catholicism and learning for our community. Today, Maepon is home

to over 100 children who live here and are cared for by our Betharram religious community, including 2 priests, 5 sisters, 1 religious teacher and myself. Our responsibilities are not only caring for the children's education and spiritual growth, but also include duties for a much wider community of Karen villages. We are responsible for saying all religious ceremonies not only in Maepon, but in a wider network of at least 20 villages.

In my mission, I have never felt forced to undertake my duties, I have only ever done them with sincerity and with the love of God in my heart. I feel this love deep in my heart every day, which has helped me to grow and take more initiative. I feel that my mission is not simply about following the orders of my community, but rather, it is about being present and seeing the needs of this community and taking initiative to address these needs. I feel that God does not just talk to us as individuals. For example, in my mission in Maepon, God always calls others to help me, and me to help others to work together. This also helps me to develop not just my personal, spiritual dimension, but helps us to grow and experience God's love together. When we work together and

be good examples for each other, as Fathers, Sisters, Religious people or Lay people, we can do our mission and God's work with more love.

Like I said in the introduction, the journey since taking my final vows has not always been an easy road. There have been challenges. As all people do, I feel tired. The role of the religious person often means putting the needs of others before ourselves. Sometimes I must keep working and going on even when I am tired or feel that I want something for myself too. If I don't always and mindfully think of the needs of others, then sometimes I won't see these needs and won't fulfill my mission. Sometimes I want to close and take a rest but inside, I feel an even stronger desire to do my duties and to serve God through his love. I ask and am grateful to God for his guidance and hand to help me in my mission, to grow and develop as a person and to work and cooperate with others well.

Reflecting on this journey from final vows to today, I am reminded of many moments of great joy and happiness. Being together during mass, prayer time and when we work together, I feel so happy because wherever I have been, I feel

that the community is my family and my home, and I feel I want to grow the happiness of these communities and not be a burden.

I need the grace of god everyday to help me to grow and continue to be humble and obedient until the day I die, never seeking power or authority from priesthood, but seeking a position which helps me become a part of the community as a family. I thank God everyday and thank all those I come across every day. ●●●





**Deacon Rawee
Prempoonwicha
scj**

*Community of
Ban Pong, Phayao,
Phanaseree*

During my life journey I was given many opportunities to experience the reality of life in Betharam Missionary Congregation. My spiritual life enabled me to experience God and to come closer to God which, helped me to be the servant of God and to live a simple life, through the congregation of Betharam.

After my final profession, I was given opportunity to live in two parishes, Epiphany parish, Fang and The Annunciation Church, Panaseree. In

both the places I have learned about how to be a good servant of God through my day today life activities. In both places I was able to teach catechism and share the Good News with children, youth and parishioners. I was able to spent time with people to listen to their life experiences and difficult moments of their life, which offered me an opportunity to share about the life of Jesus Christ with them.

All of these experiences helped me to grow more and more to respond to God's call through my preparation for priestly ordination. There are also many challenges that I face in my life journey, in spite, I believe that God is always with me and helps me to move forward with confidence. ●●●



Father Giuseppe Lietti scj

Rho, 17 December 1939 – Albavilla, 17 September 2021 (Italy)

(From the homily of the funeral of Fr Giuseppe)

“Let no one disregard you because you are young, but be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity. Until I arrive, devote yourself to reading to the people, encouraging and teaching. You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid their hands on you.” (1Tm 4,12-14)

Listening to the readings of this day, the relation between these few words and the life of Fr. Lietti comes immediately to my mind. The message that the Lord has sent us across his life – as he does with the life of each one of us – appears in all its clarity.

Devotion to the reading, loving and friendly encouragements and devotion to the teaching is constant in Fr. Lietti's life. His many friends know this well: the only gift that Fr. Lietti could ask them was the last published edition of the books of his masters in faith.

The hundreds of *fiancés* he prepared for the marriage had hardly forgotten those meetings during which he flooded them with notes, mottos, aphorisms, phrases to re-



member. They also remember his willing use of modern language techniques to transmit the Gospel of love.

The faithful members of the Erba Film Club (Erba is his birthplace in Lombardy) still remember his skills and the professionalism he showed when he presented the films and then led the debate, starting from the content presented by the screening, to lead to the most diverse issues on culture and the modern world.

Those of our brothers who lived with him know the rough sea of files, newspaper clippings, images on which he navigated quite at ease, withdrawn in his room open to the whole world. He liked to repeat that a Christian must walk in life with the Gospel in one hand and the news-

paper in the other. That is what he did and taught until his last day.

He also taught us, following St Paul, not to neglect the gifts that the Lord has placed in the heart of each one; he taught us to walk with confidence whatever the time, the season of life, the social and individual environment, remaining humbly attentive and indebted also to the many masters of our time, always enlightened by the Word coming from on high to us so that it may spread throughout the world, and illuminate the darkest recesses.

He taught us to look around us with unwavering confidence and with an almost childlike attitude: that of a child in the arms of a mother and of a God who is both Father and Mother. It was the confidence and youthful spirit with which he had supported and animated a camp of activities in Calabria, an experience marked by a milestone for some [...].

It is with this same confidence that in recent years he had penetrated, he said, into the woods, gradually detaching himself from everything, from material things, settling in silence, in search of the absolute and preparing himself for the meeting of the Lord, which took place suddenly this Wednesday morning.

An attitude that Fr. Lietti had learned in the Gospel, that he had made his own and taught in school,

in meetings and in life, was the welcome of all, without exception.

Always considered a bit like a border line because of his political ideas, the choice of his masters of life, and the fact that he broke with the norm, he incarnated, made visible and concrete, the attitude of Jesus, who came to earth to save humanity, to proclaim the Mercy of the Father for the righteous as well as for sinners... Or rather, for sinners and the so-called righteous.

"Mercy is what I want, not sacrifices; not offerings but communion with me" (Mt 12:7): this had become the motto of his life. He loved to speak of the "Church of the Apron" of Don Tonino Bello, desired by Jesus, who washes the feet of his disciples and which is also of that sinful woman of the city, who perfumes the feet of Jesus and dries them with her hair.

I thank the Lord for having given us Fr. Lietti (*Pinuccio* for his friends) who transmitted to us the love for the Word of God and for all the words of the people of our time, who testified in every circumstance to the Father's mercy and taught us to prepare ourselves serenely for the encounter with him.

May the Lord welcome him into his merciful arms. Amen.

Fr. Piero Trameri scj
Regional Vicar

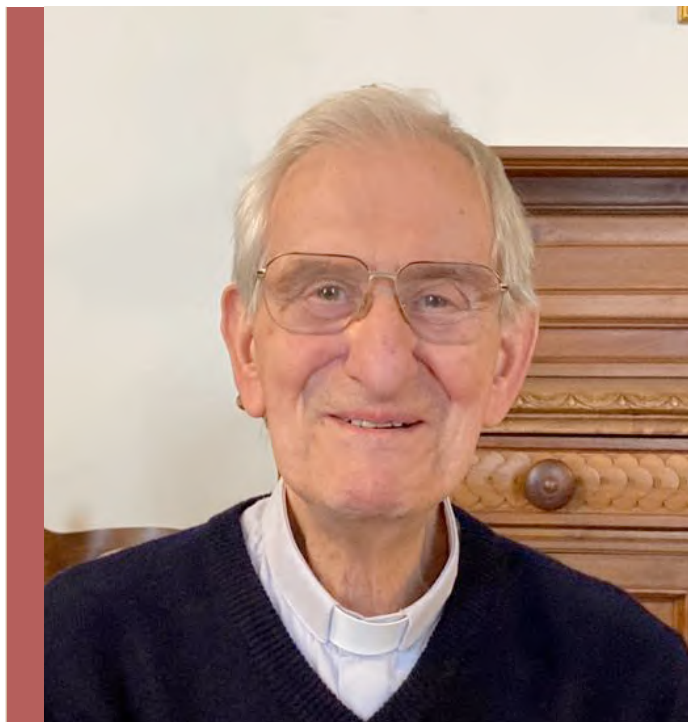
Father Giovanni Duca scj

Talamona, 18 July 1927 – Albiate, 27 September 2021 (Italy)

Extract from the homily of Fr Jean-Luc Morin SCJ, Regional Superior, during the funeral of Fr Giovanni Duca who passed away on the 75th anniversary of his religious vows, 27th September, feast of St Vincent de Paul, trainer of priests and advocate of the charity.

One day at the table in the refectory of our house in Albiate, I mentioned my lack of inspiration for a spiritual time that I had to facilitate. Straightaway, Fr Giovanni told me this anecdote : In the nineties, at a Catholic Action chaplains' congress in Rome, we were received by John Paul II. At the end of the audience with the pope, the leader of the delegation presented the participants one by one. When it was my turn, he whispered into the pope's ear, « Fr Duca, a great preacher. » « Well, Father », the pope asked me, « how many Lenten homilies are you going to preach this year ? » « Most Holy Father », I responded, « there are too many, especially as I find it hard to say something new. » The pope's reply : « Would you like a topic ? Here it is : God never gets bored loving us and forgiving us. It's all there. God never gets bored loving... No need to look for any other topic! »

All throughout his rich life, Fr Giovanni used all his energy, which was plentiful, to introduce and love God,



this Father who has a mother's heart for us. There were countless retreats, tridiums, short retreats (notably for his dear 'little ladies' as he called them, with an affection that they returned to him), Forty-Hours and of course the sermons he gave with a great oratory talent and above all a big heart. He had a particular gift for preaching, which he was aware of, sometimes with a touch of pride. As one of his fellow-brothers noted, whose homilies, steeped in lofty theology, hardly grabbed the attention of the faithful: "As for Fr Duca, he only had to get on the pulpit and say 'Jesus' in his deep voice and everyone listened dumbstruck!"

A man of preaching, he was also a good listener. He knew how to spur on, raise morale; he could also con-

sole and manage single-handedly. He spoke to men about God and to God about men, while praying the rosary alone in his room, early in the morning, or while receiving guidance at the community parlour. His brothers have not forgotten the numerous rings of the doorbell or telephone from people looking for Fr Giovanni and looking especially for a chat on faith and hope.

He listened to and absolved hundreds of religious at Asso, Erba, Mandello, Albese, Como and so many other communities. He welcomed and accompanied numerous young people from the school in Colico and from multiple youth clubs in Brianza, couples preparing for marriage, families on life's journey, with a particular attention for widows. Perhaps he spent more time in the confessional than in any other place...

Fr Giovanni had a great devotion to Our Lady. What could be more normal for a son of Maria... Ciocchina, wife of Duca. His mother only gave him one piece of advice when he became a priest: "Promise me you'll never say no when you are called to

ministry." He lived out the 'Here I Am,' dear to our founder, personally, a true priest of the Sacred Heart. When he was asked to do a pastoral service, he was always ready, available: "I'll go" he would say with eagerness. Even when tired, he never shied away from the call of the parish priest, nor of a Father or Mother Superior.

Allow me one last anecdote, significant of his personality and of the message he leaves us.

Some time ago, I opened myself up to him about certain existential doubts. "Don't wonder whether you have done well or badly", he told me. "At the end of the day, ask yourself just one question: will the Lord be pleased with me today?"

And so, at the end of his life, on the first day of eternity, what is important is that Fr Duca heard, as we have felt so often in his presence: "I am glad that you are here. Giovanni, come into my joy." Here we are.

Thank you, my Father. Rest in the Heart of the Lord. Always. ●●●



In memoriam

- ITALY, Lainate • **Mrs Virginia Re**, sister of Fr Natale Re scj of the Pistoia community (Vicariate of Italy), died on September 27th.

She was 72 years old. We express to Fr Natale and to his dear ones our condolences and we promise to pray for his dear sister. May the Risen Lord grant her the fulness of his joy and love.



“ Come, Holy Spirit! You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a “museum Church”, beautiful but mute, with much past and little future. Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions. Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to hear your voice! Come, Holy Spirit of holiness, renew the holy and faithful People of God! Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth! Amen. ”

Prayer at the end of the address of his holiness Pope Francis for the opening of the synod, New Synod Hall, Saturday, 9 October 2021



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