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Go out to announce that Jesus Christ is the Lord, 100 years from the mission in China

*“And he said to them: go out to the whole world
and proclaim the Good News to all creation.”
(Mk 16,15)*

Dear Betharramites,

Betharram has always been mission-orientated since its origins. St. Michael wanted it that way. The first Betharramites went out in mission to America to support the Basque emigrants in Argentina and Uruguay. This was probably the most important missionary movement that the fledgling Society of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had experienced, but it would not be the last one. Years later the Pope will call on us to go to China.

In the 1920s, Bishop De Gorostazu, Apostolic Vicar of Kunming (capital of Yunnan), asked Cardinal Van Rossum, for a group of priests to evangelize part of his immense diocese. Pope Benedict XV then asked our Superior General Fr. Hippolyte Paillas scj if the fathers of Betharram were



Fr Pierre Erdozaincy-Etchart scj, in the middle, surrounded by Fr. François Palou scj and Fr. Louis Pirmez scj, 22 January 1922.

interested in the evangelization of Yunnan. The proposal was received with great enthusiasm among Betharramites. Numerous novices and scholastics dreamt of offering themselves for this service.

The Grace of God worked in their hearts and prompted them to accept great sacrifices to establish a mission in these remote lands. The first three chosen (among many candidates) were Fr Etchart, Fr Palou and Fr Pirmez. On January 23 1922 an adventure began that would last thirty years (from 1922 to 1952). They left Marseille on January 25 and arrived in Kunming on March 11, 1922.

They went out to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, our Saviour.

Their first inculturation process lasted more than two years. They had to apply themselves to **listening**, studying the language, adapting to the difficult climate and local customs. They also **met up** with MEP Missionaries to learn the ways of mission and evangelization in Chinese culture.

The few Christians in the villages did not enjoy a good reputation. There was a popular saying: "*Only bad people become Christians ...*" So resistance to embracing the faith was remarkable... But they were not discouraged, confident that God would provide!

Soon the first **discernment** was made: What place to choose for a Betharramite mission? The possibility emerged of settling in **Talí**, an area belonging to the Apostolic Vicariate of Kunming. So on October 9, 1924 they settled there. Countless incidents occurred after their arrival.

The roads were watched. Criminal gangs dominated the area and made apostolic work dangerous. There was no local respect for our missionaries, who were often victim to robbers.

Later, nature would also put them to the test: a violent earthquake occurred on March 17, 1925, and the mission house was destroyed. Happily the missionaries survived, but the city itself was in ruins, and 5000 people perished.

This was the opportunity to demonstrate love, which can conquer all, and needs no interpretation. The missionaries set about helping the most affected people, with the limited means they had, going from door to door. Collections were organized in Europe and America. And their selfless dedication would bring about a remarkable change of attitude in the local population. Those sent to evangelize reaped the first fruits of their solidarity with a suffering people.

On November 13, 1925 three other religious arrived: Frs. Jean Oxibar, Felix Trezzi and Alfred Barcelone. Many others joined in the following years¹. In all a total of 40 Betharramite missionaries went to China.

Two small schools were soon opened in the mission, one for girls (later adopted by the Daughters of the Cross in 1934) and another for boys, under the direction of Fr Felix Trezzi scj. It began after the earthquake with just 90 students but by 1930 there were 340.

Years passed before they saw the first baptism arrive. In 1926, there are already some 12 catechumens. And by 1928 there were sixty. No longer was it heard that "only bad people become Christian". Faith gradually reached the neighbouring villages too.

In November 1929 the *missio sui iuris* (Independent Mission) was erected in Talí and Fr Etchart was appointed Superior of the mission, which became independent from the Apostolic Vicariate of Kunming. But a year and a half later, Fr Etchart fell ill and died a holy death without abandoning the mission. His death left the missionaries feeling bereaved and even orphaned. He was the first of several missionaries, to die in the mission of China: Fr. J. Darrière ('38), Fr. Juan Huwel ('38), Fr. F. Darnaudery ('39), Fr. Henry Bart (assassinated in '40) , Fr. Alejandro Miguel (assassinated in '42), Bro. Javier Iragui ('44), Fr. Luigi Gusmeroli ('51). Illness, fatigue, deprivation and even martyrdom took them to the Betharram of Heaven.

1) Including Fr.Dutton and Fr. Bradley from England [note of the translator].

Missionary proclamation slowly spread the faith to the neighbouring towns. Resistance diminished and the gospel spread among new Christians in the margins.

In December 1934 the mission was established as an Apostolic Prefecture and the first Prefect appointed by the Holy See was Fr. Jean Baptiste Magenties. Fourteen years later, in 1948, it became the Diocese of Talí whose first Bishop was Bishop Lucien Lacoste scj, consecrated Bishop on May 29, 1949 in Kunming Cathedral.

Meaningful is the witness of Fr. Oxibar and, later, of Fr. Etchaide, who missioned among the people of the Lahou tribe (among whom there were 100,000 catechumens and 50,000 baptized by 1950). Many of them were persecuted and tortured for embracing the faith.

Finally, time led the mission to a critical point: the arrival of communism in China. With it, the presence of the Betharramites in the diocese of Talí came to an end.

Between 1950 and 1951 all the missionaries were expelled, except for three: Bishop Lacoste, Fr. Gioacchino Spini and Fr Toucoulet, who were taken prisoner by the communist authorities, together with a daughter of the Cross, Sr. Albina Trameri.

On July 4, 1952, they were released and left China for good on July 18 of that year. But their departure from China brought Betharram fathers to Thailand. Their soul and spirit survive in this region... the fruit of the blood sown in mission.

This January 23, 2022, it will be exactly 100 years since the beginning of the event that began the missionary presence of Betharram in East Asia.

This centenary of the departure for China cannot go unnoticed among us Betharramites of today. The missionary spirit of these men is the heritage of Betharram, our legacy. And I am sure that many of us, religious and laity, carry their spirit at this moment in history in which we live.

The future of our religious family continues to depend on our creative fidelity to this missionary charism, nurtured by availability, dedication, sacrifice and obedience.

P. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General



Homily, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

55th World Day of Peace, St Peter's Basilica, Saturday, 1st January 2022

The shepherds found *"Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger"* (Lk 2:16). For the shepherds, the manger was a joyful sign: it was the confirmation of the message they had heard from the angel (cf. v. 12), the place where they found the Saviour. [...]

How can Mary hold together the throne of a king and the lowly manger? How can she reconcile the glory of the Most High and the bitter poverty of a stable? Let us think of the distress of the Mother of God. What can be more painful for a mother than to see her child suffering poverty? It is troubling indeed. We would not blame Mary, were she to complain of those unexpected troubles. Yet she does not lose heart. She does not complain, but keeps silent. Rather than complain, she chooses a different part: For her part, the Gospel tells us, Mary *"kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"* (cf. Lk 2:19).

That is not what the shepherds and the people do. The shepherds tell everyone about what they had seen:

the angel that appeared in the heart of the night, and his words concerning the Child. And the people, upon hearing these things, are amazed (cf. v. 18). Words and amazement. Mary, instead, is pensive; she keeps all these things, pondering them in her heart. We ourselves can have the same two different responses. [...]

Mary's pensiveness [...] is the expression of a mature, adult faith, not a faith of beginners. Not a newborn faith, it is rather a faith that now gives birth. For spiritual fruitfulness is born of trials and testing. From the quiet of Nazareth and from the triumphant promises received by the Angel – the beginnings – Mary now finds herself in the dark stable of Bethlehem. Yet that is where she gives God to the world. Others, before the scandal of the manger, might feel deeply troubled. She does not: she keeps those things, pondering them in her heart.

Let us learn from the Mother of God how to have that same attitude: to keep and to ponder. [...]

I ask, brothers and sisters, how

do we make this passage, how do we surmount this clash between the ideal and the real? By doing exactly what Mary did: by keeping and by pondering. First, Mary “keeps”, that is she holds on to what happens; she does not forget or reject it. She keeps in her heart everything that she saw and heard. The beautiful things, like those spoken to her by the angel and the shepherds, but also the troubling things: the danger of being found pregnant before marriage and, now, the lowly stable where she has had to give birth. That is what Mary does. She does not pick and choose; she keeps. She accepts life as it comes, without trying to camouflage or embellish it; she keeps those things in her heart.

Then, Mary’s second attitude is about how she keeps: she keeps and she ponders. The Gospel speaks of Mary “bringing together”, comparing, her different experiences and finding the hidden threads that connect them. In her heart, in her prayer, she does exactly that: she binds together the beautiful things and the unpleasant things. She does not keep them apart, but brings them together. It is for this reason that Mary is said to be the Mother of Catholicity. In this regard, we can dare to say that it is because of this that Mary is said to be Catholic, for she unites, she does not divide. And in this way she discerns their greater meaning, from God’s perspective. In her mother’s heart, Mary comes to

realize that the glory of the Most High appears in humility; she welcomes the plan of salvation whereby God must lie in a manger. She sees the divine Child frail and shivering, and she accepts the wondrous divine interplay between grandeur and littleness. Mary keeps and ponders.

This inclusive way of seeing things, which transcends tensions by “keeping” and “pondering”, is the way of mothers, who, in moments of tension, do not divide, they keep, and in this way enable life to grow. It is the way so many mothers embrace the problems of their children. [...]

The New Year begins under the sign of the Holy Mother of God, under the sign of the Mother. A mother’s gaze is the path to rebirth and growth. We need mothers, women who look at the world not to exploit it, but so that it can have life. Women who, seeing with the heart, can combine dreams and aspirations with concrete reality, without drifting into abstraction and sterile pragmatism. And the Church is a Mother, this is what makes the Church feminine. [...]

At the beginning of the New Year, then, let us place ourselves under the protection of this woman, the Mother of God, who is also our mother. May she help us to keep and ponder all things, unafraid of trials and with the joyful certainty that the Lord is faithful and can transform every cross into a resurrection. [...] Amen. ■



*...Fr. Beniamino Gusmeroli scj
and the Community of Bimbo • Bangui*

Our Lady of the Visitation, the church at the heart of a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Bangui

At the end of 2018, the Cardinal of Bangui entrusted the Congregation of the Betharram Fathers with the pastoral mission of opening a new parish in the village of Bimbo on the outskirts of Bangui. After four years of missionary life in Niem and twenty-two years in Bouar, I found myself catapulted here to start again from scratch.

In Bimbo, there was nothing other than a house provided to us by the Diocese to serve as a presbytery. Father Armel Daly, from the Côte d'Ivoire, and myself were chosen for a double mission: creating a new parish and welcoming young people interested in religious vocations as aspirants. I was asked to take charge of the parish, while Father Armel was entrusted with vocation promotion.

The parish was soon established by a Cardinal decree which nominated me as parish priest and my religious brother as curate. Just before the setting up of the parish, the Cardinal asked me to think about a name. From

a meeting with some lay people of the neighbourhood, the name 'Our Lady of the Visitation' came to be. This title was explained like this: seen through the eyes of faith, the new parish is a grace for our neighbourhoods, a visit from God in our difficult situations: following the example of Mary visiting Elizabeth, Mary visits us today. The Cardinal liked the name and it was taken on.

In the beginning, we didn't have the land to build parish buildings on, not even the church. We only had a house available to us, situated amongst the people of the neighbourhood. We were welcomed straightaway, which helped along our social integration and our missionary presence.

Why did the Diocese of Bangui decide to set up a new Parish in Bimbo? In 2013, foreign, armed groups, supported by people within the country, staged a coup and guerilla warfare spread to the neighbourhoods. Since then, we have been in a situation of war in Central Africa. Many people fled their houses to move into calmer areas. Well

away from the epicentre of the conflict, Bimbo became in a short space of time a safe place for thousands of refugees, coming from the capital as well as the interior of the country.

The neighbourhood developed in an excessive way. The smallest free space was occupied by people who were fleeing and totally destitute, as their possessions had been destroyed. The large majority of people who live here are unemployed and live ad-hoc. We can easily imagine the problems that flow from such a situation, in particular among young people and children, between the impact of the war and the lack of prospects. It's one of the big challenges of our mission, without a church and without a welcome structure.

With the cluster of huts occupying the whole place, it was difficult to find a space big enough to build parish buildings; we needed two years to find adequate land. But what's interesting is that the mission is made with people and not structures. The land, which is 10,000m², was at last found: a real gift and a sign. We organised ourselves and built a hall as a parish church, big enough to have around 600 people assemble.

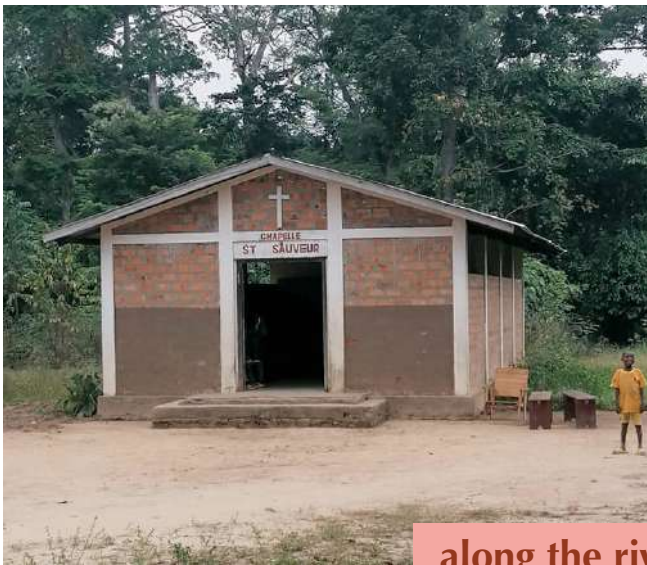
Here in Bangui, it is a source of hope as the Church shows solidarity with the population. Several parish groups have been formed,

whether they be action groups, prayer groups, apostolate groups. There is a strong presence of children and young people who must be listened to and followed. The missionary style we believe in and implement is working together: working with people, involving them, trying to understand needs, potentials, and reading the situation together and we act as a facilitator for initiatives in which they are involved.

Our people understood and told me: 'Father, your way of doing is to gather people'. I thought immediately of the numerous children and young people of the neighbourhood: the street is often the only place where they can pass time. That is why a ball and basketball court have been put in place. The parish, apart from the centre, comprises fifteen chapels at the moment, situated along the large river, Oubangui. The furthest is about sixty kilometres away, accessible by the river by dugout canoe.

Amongst the activities, there are, as I said before:





along the river Oubangui

- the construction of the house where we all meet to pray, listen to word of the Gospel and celebrate the Eucharist.

- with the parish Caritas group, we have launched a series of collaboration activities, with a women's prison on the parish land: literacy, hygiene, leisure time and, within the means that we might have, undertaking educational activities such as sewing/dressmaking.

- In the field of school education, with the help of some Italian friends, we built a school in the neighbourhood for a local association that takes care of orphaned or poor children. It is planned to build another school in one of the villages.

- In the fifteen villages, situated along the River Oubangui, we have set up a primary school, supported by a missionary group, and we help another five. In total, around 1600 children can thereby attend primary school.

- After a long work of reflection and research on the way to respond to different requests, with the parish Caritas group, we have a modest farming business project which involves

for now forty farmers and around thirty women who are the heads of their families and in a difficult situation. In brief, it's about stepping up banana growing, buying products and taking them to Bangui to distribute them to the thirty women who are beneficiaries and who sell the bananas on the Bimbo and Bangui market. A kind of African style *Banana Joe*¹. It's a project that has some opportunity to develop as much for the growers as the sellers. Our aim is to spread this to other villages and to diversify the agricultural production. Will we succeed?

- For children and young people, we have started to fill up free time with recreational activities aimed at social cohesion: the construction of a recreational centre with courts for playing ball-games, basketball and volleyball: to learn to be together through games.

1) 1982 Italian film, *Banana Joe* (personified by Bud Spencer) lives in a little tropical village. Far away from corruption and from the problems of modern day society, he grows bananas and brings life to the whole village, until the day when a businessman with no scruples wants to set up a banana business.

- With the young people, we have started a series of activities to try to overcome the impact of war, a series of meetings with people prepared in self awareness to try to open up a better future, also including a music school.

We have a lot of dreams stored up.

- A beautiful church for which we already have a project.

- A technical school for boys and girls.

- A high school for the youth from the villages along the river. Once primary education is finished, many who want to continue their studies cannot do so, or if they do continue, they have to go to Bangui with all the risks that brings. So, very few of them finish their studies.

But all these are only dreams for the moment, for which we still lack a well defined project and above all the means to make them happen. But it is dreams, especially those with a view to the common good, which are the strength of life.

As far as the second objective is concerned for our presence in Bangui, we can inform you that six young people have already come to, or are currently staying at, our house. They stay with us for a year. If they decide to continue, they are received by the formation community in Bouar. There, besides learning the fundamentals of the religious vocation and shared life, they attend the intercongregational centre for aspirants for the preparatory course.

The ecclesiastical situation of the Archdiocese of Bangui is well organised and diversified: it's a church full of life; I would love to say

'synodal', given the presence, the participation and the taking on of responsibilities by the lay people who want to take care themselves of their church. The work of the priests is well-structured, just as well from the point of view of continuous formation as of collaboration: in our deanship, for example, we work together in varied circumstances, notably for confessions at key moments.

As Apostle of Peace, the Cardinal of Bangui is a true example. He travels the country endlessly to meet all the parties involved in the conflict and to talk to them. He also meets ordinary people, notably those who lost heart in the ruined villages and who were persecuted as well as in the refugee camps. He made contact and close collaboration with his priests a priority of his ministry.

Our reality in Bangui is a promising situation in many respects: from the point of view of the mission, from the presence amongst people, the possibility of integration in the education sector in particular. We are asked a lot – and the cardinal is delighted about it – to set up a professional education centre for the thousands of young people, girls and boys, of the Bimbo Commune: we hope to succeed.

We feel able to take our church project out towards the social, geographical and human peripheries, of a synodal church following our founder St Michael Garicoits. Many depend upon our formation to prepare Betharramites shaped in this spirit. ■

•\• Some news

from the communities •/\•



» On November 14, in the Basilica of Sainte Germaine of **Pibrac** (France), during the Sunday Mass presided over by Fr. Vincent Landel SCJ (Bishop emeritus of Rabat - Morocco), Fr. Jean-Luc Morin SCJ, Regional Superior, conferred the ministry of reader to the scholastics **Br Aurélien Kouamé SCJ** and **Br. Salomon Bandama SCJ** (2nd year of theology at the Catholic Institute of Toulouse).

» From **Ho Chi Minh City** (Vietnam), Fr. Albert Sa-at Prathansantiphong SCJ, responsible for the residence in Vietnam, writes to share the experience of solidarity of the community towards families in difficulty due to the pandemic and the poor and marginalized of the City, thanks above all to the help and collaboration of benefactors.

'We are glad to follow the advice we read last month in the NEF: our Superior general was encouraging us to walk together with our benefactors and the poor and the marginalised. As Mother Teresa said, "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."

We asked our benefactors to help us to bring food and some money to some poor families and to some homeless people. The food was provided by our benefactors and some religious



sisters. The money was offered by the laity from St. Dominic parish. As a small Betharramite branch we are happy to share our joy and to cooperate with our benefactors.'

» On November 18, in **Lambaré** (Paraguay), the members of the FVD Group participated in a meeting with Fr. Gustavo Agín scj, Superior General, at the House of Spirituality "Our Lady of Betharram". They reflected on the theme of the Synod, called by Pope Francis: "*For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission*", held in the context of the present situation of the Church and of the Betharram laity in Paraguay. In a friendly and joyful atmosphere, where all were ready to listen to each other, the participants asked questions to Fr Gustavo and shared some personal reflections.

» On 4th December, the religious of the Vicariate of Thailand held an assembly in **Ban Betharram–Chiang Mai**, on the occasion offered by the traditional meeting of the priests of the Diocese of Chiang Mai with the Bishop. The assembly was presided over by the First Regional Vicar Fr. Chan Kunu SCJ, and many religious of the Vicariate took part in it. The concluding celebration was presided over by **the two newly ordained priests of the Vicariate: Fr. Peter Rawee Prempoonwicha SCJ and Fr. James Thanit Panmanikun SCJ.**

» The restoration of the Calvary of **Betharram** proceeds little by little. A first part of the works was completed, which includes the first 6





stations and the fountain of Saint Roch. On Thursday 9 December, Fr. Laurent Bacho SCJ, Regional Vicar, welcomed the Prefect of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques Region for the delivery of this first phase of the works, with the Mayor of Lestelle-Bétharram, the Departmental Councilor and the members of the Association of 'Friends of the Sanctuaries'. Every pilgrim, visitor or passer-by, will appreciate this work, which can also invite you to turn to the One who never ceases to give his life in abundance, out of love.

» On 10 December in **Sampran** (Thailand), our brothers **Peter Hung scj** and **Anselm Prapas scj** (both second year theology students) received the ministry of Reader at Saengtham College, the major seminary of the Diocese of Bangkok. The ministry was conferred by Mgr Joseph Prathan Sridarunsil, Bishop of the Diocese of Surat Thani. We congratulate our brothers and wish them a fruitful ministry in serving and announcing the Word of God.

» On Wednesday 15 December, during a Eucharistic celebration in the Chapel of the Regional Scholasticate of **Belo Horizonte**, **Br. Antonio Thiago Gordiano Sampaio scj** renewed for one year the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in our religious family. The celebration was presided over by Fr. Paulo César Pinto scj, Regional Vicar in Brazil and delegate of the Regional Superior, Fr. Daniel González scj. Fr. Davi Lara scj, Master of Scholastics, Fr. Wagner Dos Reis Azevedo scj also concelebrated. Some lay people from the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish



of Nova Granada, who share the Betharramite charism, were also present.

In his homily, Fr. Paulo highlighted the important step taken by Br. Thiago, and the pedagogy of God and of the Congregation.

God always accompanies us in the path of configuration to his Son Jesus and confirms the choice of the state of religious life when the vows are renewed.

» Tuesday 14 December, in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of **Barracas** (Argentina), diplomas of recognition were delivered to all those who participated in the "Laborterapia" and "Talleres Del Sagrado" during this 2021.

It was possible to **celebrate life, faith, work, efforts and all the experience accumulated and shared during this year**, with the presence of the officials of the *Secretariat for Integral Drug Policies* and the *Ministry of Social Development of the Nation*, the directors of the various houses of the "Hogar de Cristo" and a large number of members and volunteers of the Cooperative "DUCHAS-APerSiCa" (initiative of the Betharramite Parish of the Sacred Heart of Barracas).

Why receive a diploma with name and surname and the "specialty" in which one was involved? Because it is similar to what God does with each of us: he calls us by name. Being called by name by God means that we are not strangers or anonymous. We are valuable in God's eyes. When God calls me by name, he saves me from oblivion, darkness and death. The name on a diploma means all this. In other words, each single person, called by name and surname, is worthy and capable.





Dear readers, you cannot imagine the awesome and liberating power of all of this.

» After traveling among the various Vicariates of the Region, **Fr. Gustavo Agín scj, Superior General**, visited the community of San Juan Bautista, in **Buenos Aires** and met with some lay people representing the different groups involved in the different institutions of the Vicariate.

Fr Gustavo appreciated the work that many lay people do in favor of Betharram.

He described the various Betharramite institutions in the world, leading the audience in a virtual tour with the help of the photos collected during his visits.

The Eucharist in honour of the Holy Innocents brought the gathering to an end.

» The General Assembly of the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire was held on Tuesday 28 December in the community of **Yamoussoukro**. Main topics on the agenda: 1- EMI (International Missionary Aid): presentation and new perspectives; 2- Report of the different commissions; 3- Economy of the Vicariate.

» Since the establishment of the interregional novitiate in the Holy Land has been prevented this year by the pandemic, the extraordinary novitiate for the novices of the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire is renewed this year in **Adiopodoumé**. Hence, Saturday, January 8, at the Chapel "St Mary of Jesus Crucified" of the Formation House, took place, during solemn vespers on the eve of the Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord Jesus, the entrance to the novitiate of our





young brothers **Samuel Monkerembi Douwa**, **Dieu-Bénit Christopher Sembon** and **Eugène Ishyirimbère**. After their journey in the Postulancy of our Congregation, our young brothers wanted, with the grace of God, to deepen their knowledge of Christ answering as he did "*Here I am!*" to the call of the Father, in the footsteps of our Fr. Saint Michael Garicoïts.

Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi SCJ, Superior of the Formation House, Master of Scholastics and Master of Novices, in order to characterize the entry into the novitiate, pronounced on them the blessing of the Lord and handed over the "*Spiritual Doctrine*".



» In the Central African Republic, the community of **Bouar**, established as House of the postulancy, gradually finds its marks. On Thursday, December 23, the gathering and celebration of the **entry to the postulancy** of **Germain Kwetakwenda Lundu** (hailing from the Democratic Rep. of the Congo) and **Maxime Yamalé** (from the Rep. of Central Africa) took place.



Happy New Year 2022 to all our brothers, to
all the SCJ communities around the world,
to the lay associates and to the friends of Betharram!

THAILAND - Chiang Mai, December 23rd 2021 Final profession of Br Phanupan scj y Br Phichet scj

On 23 December our brothers **Br. Peter Phichet Wijunwayu scj** and **Br. Mathew Phanupan Shaichonsrijinda scj** made their perpetual vows during the solemn concelebration that took place in the chapel of the "Ban Betharram" community in Chiang Mai.



From left to right: Br. Peter Phichet, Fr. John Chan and Br. Mathew Phanupan

The Holy Mass was presided over by Fr. John Chan Kunu SCJ, 1st Regional Vicar in Thailand and Delegate of the Superior General Fr. Gustavo Agín SCJ.

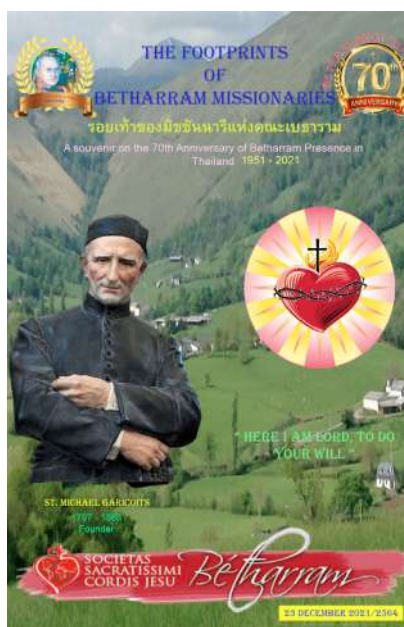
It was a solemn celebration in which most of the Betharramite religious of the Vicariate and the brothers, sisters and family of the two professed participated. We thank the Lord for calling these brothers into our Congregation and wish them all

the best for their future journey in religious life.

The Vicariate was also extremely happy to publish a book entitled: ***"The footsteps of the Betharramite missionaries"*** on the occasion of the **70th anniversary of the presence of Betharram in Thailand.**

We hope that this book will help to better understand the history





of Betharram in Thailand and to deepen ever more the life of St. Michael Garicoïts, of St. Mary of Jesus Crucified, of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar.

With immense joy and profound gratitude to God, the whole

Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram thanks and praises God for the gift of the two young Perpetually Professed. ■



Canonical visit to the Vicariate of Paraguay

Fr. Alberto Zaracho Barrios scj
Regional Vicar

Within the ecclesial Synodality framework, the Church of God is called to synod, which coincides this year in Paraguay with a Year of the laity. It is a time to reflect and discern

the identity, vocation and mission of the laity, in the light of the Bétharramite charism, of the "Here I am." Bétharram is experiencing the renewing grace that restores the gener-

ous impulse to evangelize in pastoral works – in apostolic works and in the educational communities of the Vicariate.

In this sense, we consider the Canonical Visit of the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín, SCJ, as a time of grace, because his presence in the Vicariate is a prophetic sign that unites, encourages, strengthens, renews and gathers us together, to meet, listen, discern and to take up together the Voice of the Lord which guides us in the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6).

This is what the Synodality consists of; “walking together” as the People of God, as a Congregation, to revive and renew our fidelity to following Jesus in fraternal communion in this place where the Holy Spirit acts and manifests himself to animate and sustain us.

The final report of the canonical visit was very precise and realistic. It revealed the virtues, strengths, joys as well as weaknesses, fragilities and specific concerns that threaten fraternal community life.

It recognizes and values the availability as well as the quality of service performed by religious and lay people engaged in pastoral work, whether apostolic or educational. This service helps us to value work as an instrument of humanization and encourages us to walk together to face the great challenges of contemporary culture.

The Superior General expressed his gratitude to religious and lay people for their availability in the mission entrusted to them, as well as his support in continuing to evangelize in the same spirit by bringing a response of faith, as a charitable gesture, to the most vulnerable in society.

With the theme of the Congregation for the year 2022: “*Going out to communicate: meeting, listening, discerning together*”, the Superior General left us a message full of hope and reconciliation, exhorting us to live in the mysticism of meeting in order to listen to each other, by witnessing to fraternal communion, so that we may be the prophetic sign of the Kingdom in a world divided by hatred and war.

Let us give thanks to God for this blessed and fruitful canonical visit, a time of grace that renews and revives our fidelity to the charism, vocation and Bétharramite mission in Paraguay.





A journey of love to live as brothers and form a living dynamic community

|
Fr. Armel Daly Vabié scj

Saturday 11 December: the Community of Adiapodoumé gathered together for a day's reflection on the season of Advent. The day of recollection had in fact begun the evening before, at Compline, in order to enter more fully in the season of Advent and thus better prepare for and welcome the coming of the Infant Jesus.

Then the day of December 11th itself began with prayers of praise, followed by a retreat led by Fr Armel Daly, SCJ.

The topic we shared was: *"Advent: a journey of love to live as brothers and form a living dynamic community"*.

By leaving the Christmas season, we are pleased to offer you a few moments of this reflection.

When the season of Advent comes around, we are made to confront the strong words of warning contained in the prophecies of Isaiah, which John the Baptist recalls so vividly: *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths, every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; everything crooked shall*

be made straight and the rough paths smooth; and every mortal shall see the salvation of God".

These places or realities mentioned - ways, paths, valleys, mountains and hills; crooked passages, rough paths - refer to the heart of mankind (to be converted).

Turning to face the future, the season of Advent invites us to set out on a journey. And so with a livelier faith, we prepare ourselves to commemorate the coming of Christ amongst us, at His birth in Bethlehem.

Yes! It falls to each of us to set out on this journey as if we are to live something important, something real, with the Lord and with our neighbour.

- Set out on the journey to celebrate Love (this secret *spring* which our founder, Saint Michael Garicoits, talks about).

- Set out on this journey to live as brothers in our Community of Adiapodoumé.

- Set out on this journey to form a

dynamic living community.

We have the right intentions. What do we have to do to transform them into reality?

Meditation: Mt 19: 16-22.

What do we find?

- We find a young man who comes freely to see Jesus. His intention is a good one. He wants to discover what could bring him even closer to God. It could be said that his behaviour is already without reproach as he lives a good life and obeys the Commandments.

- Jesus receives him as a friend. He listens to him and observes him with attention and respect. But Jesus finds that this young man, whose behaviour is exemplary, nevertheless still has some way to go. That is why Jesus says to him: *"If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you possess, give the*

money to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then, come back and follow me".

This young man is looking for something that really matters to him. You can feel how important it is in the way he asks Jesus: Master, what good work must I do to receive eternal life?

When Jesus shows him the route he should take, the young man is unhappy and refuses the solution Jesus offers him. And yet it was his search for this solution which led him to Jesus in the first place.

The young man's intention alone is not sufficient to get him to accept the remedy Jesus proposes. Or, at least, he didn't want to make the step from what he said (his intention) to what needs to be done. We can see that it's not just a question of having the right intentions. Wanting to get to point A serves no purpose if you refuse to take the right path and all the ways that



lead thereto. Dreaming of a journey of love, of wanting to live together in a fraternal community serves no purpose if you remain hostile to the means whereby you contribute to achieving this dream.

It's fine to have plans, to dream, to project oneself into the future... but it will be pointless, indeed utterly pointless, if no steps are taken to turn the intention into action.

Turning good intentions into action, how does that happen?

I could revisit my intentions/convictions on a continuing basis and equip myself with the concrete means of attaining the goal I have consciously and freely set for myself.

There is no place for illusion here... I must grasp the fact that everything is built up in little steps, through effort and faithfulness, even in the worst moments of uncertainty.

How could I possibly hope to possess tomorrow what I refuse to build today?

Is it possible tomorrow to profit from the benefits of an enterprise I refuse to undertake today?

Nothing is a given, everything must be laboured for! He who does nothing today shall have nothing tomorrow!

To embark on this journey to live in love, to live as brothers in our Community of Adiapodoumé, to form a living dynamic community... What needs to be done to get there?

The words of the Prophet Baruch come to mind here: "(...) put off your garment of mourning and unhappiness, put on the splendour and glory of God for ever (...)".

For me this means:

Taking a good look at yourself. And, in the silence of your heart, shine a light on your relationship with God, your relationship with other people; that is to say:

- What is your image of God (who is God for you)?
- How do you pray to Him?
- How do you approach the sacraments?
- Who is your neighbour?
- What are the criteria (private to you) on which you start to treat X person as your brother?
- What shadowy area in your life needs a visit from the Holy Spirit to enable you to rejoin the others on the Way of Love so that all together, you may live as brothers in a living dynamic community?

How is it for everyone else, each in his own community?



In accordance with Statute No. 10 of the Rule of Life, the Superior General with his Council (meeting on 17 November 2021) has **appointed the members of the Commission responsible for the preparation of the next General Chapter to be held in 2023** : Fr. Gustavo Agín, Superior General (President of the Commission); Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue (General Vicar); Fr. Graziano Sala (General Secretary); Fr. Stervin Selvadass (General Councillor for Formation); Fr. Tobia Sosio (General Councillor for Missions); Fr. Jean-Luc Morin (Regional Superior - Region St. Michael Garicoïts); Fr. Daniel González, (Regional Superior - Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar); Fr. Enrico Frigerio (Regional Superior - Region St. Mary of Jesus Crucified). The Commission will meet several times during the year 2022 by teleconference to monitor the progress of the reflection made by the communities with a view to the Regional Chapters and the General Chapter.

At the session of the General Council on December 20, 2021, the Superior General with his Council approved the **restitution of the parish of Great Barr to the Archdiocese of Birmingham** (Vicariate of England, Region Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified).



In the Peace of the Lord

We express our condolences to our brothers who have lost a dear family member in recent months.

*In Italy, **Mrs. Inses Ratti**, mother of Fr. Damiano Colleoni scj, died on November 24th, in Giussano.*

*In the Ivory Coast, on December 3rd, **Mr. Léon Kissi**, brother of Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi scj, passed away at the age of 53.*

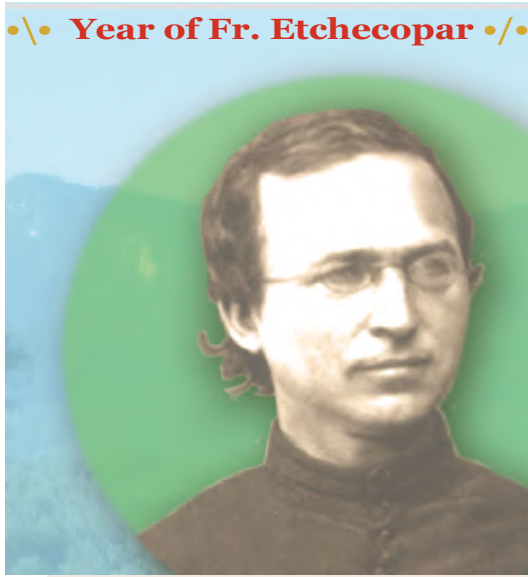
***Mr. Ange Daly**, 39, twin brother of Fr Armel Daly SCJ, died on December 29.*

*In Thailand, **Mr Paul Weerachai Bi-thu**, 60, father of Fr David Bi-Thu Pitak SCJ, died on December 30, due to an accident.*

*In India, **Mr. Anthony Varghese Panthalukkaran**, 78, Fr Biju Anthony's father, of the community of Olton (Vicariate of England), died on the eve of January 8, in Pushpagiri (Kerala).*

*In Cheriya Kadavu (Kerala), **Mr. P. V. Joseph Puliampally**, father of Fr Jacob Biso SCJ died on January 13th. He was 73 years old.*

Let us remember their dear ones in our prayers.



A man of Faith

In recent years, the NEF has presented on several occasions the figure of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar, highlighting each time different aspects: his life, the work he accomplished as a fellow-traveller of St. Michael Garicoits, and his work as the third Superior General of the Congregation.

The purpose was also to make available to all, a portion, however small, of his abundant and rich written correspondence over the years, which is like a "gold mine", even for those who would like to deepen the charism that the Holy Spirit inspired in St Michael Garicoits.

During this year 2022, we would like to venture deeper into the spirituality of Fr. Etchecopar, beginning by asking ourselves, for example: how did he live his life of faith, hope and charity?

How did he live his virtues in his everyday life? The pathway we will construct will always borrow from the thought of Fr. Etchecopar as it appears in his letters; but he will also try to grasp the salient features from his experience.

In this month of January, we will look at how Fr. Etchecopar lived his faith: would it be a faith coloured by "sentiment" or "ideology"? What were the sources that nourished his faith? How did he express it? All these questions are raised by the readers of his texts and prompt us to deepen the search in the supplement attached to this issue of the NEF.

On this journey, we will be led by the careful study carried out by Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj, Superior General from 2005 to 2017, who took up the challenge of trying to trace a few paths, to help us get to know Fr. Auguste Etchecopar better, and thence to live our faith better, nourish hope and express charity.

January 2022 NEF Supplement:

«Father Etchecopar, a man of faith» | Rev. Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj



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