

دي عيس دال ي م د ع **Feliz Natal Merry Christmas**

**¡Feliz Navidad!**

Giáng sinh vui vẻ

สุขสันต์วันคริสต์มาส

**Joyeux Noël**

**Buon Natale**

“Console my people,  
console them,  
says your God.”

(Is. 40, 1)

“The Lord comes often to us  
in Holy Communion.  
He consecrates our tongues,  
our bodies, our hearts  
and unites us to Him,  
identifies us with Him.”

(St. Michael Garicoits)



*P. Gustavo sj*  
Superior General  
and Council



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Happy Christmas!

### A word of the superior general

## A new stage of the synodal pathway

*“Then the entire assembly fell silent,  
to listen to Barnabas and Paul,  
who began to relate the signs and wonders  
which God had accomplished among the pagans through them.”*

(Acts 15, 12)

Dear Betharramites:

**Synodality** has been a characteristic and fundamental component of the Church since its origins. It is part of a process that began then and that has not yet ended. It was born with the Church and continues throughout its history. It is true that, for centuries, it was losing vitality as the Church became entangled with complex, pyramidal structures, which were no help to its mission. However, the Spirit did not stop breathing life into the ecclesial community to renew it despite the fact that its relationship with temporal power gave way to *clericalism* and a progressive *worldliness* only lessened by the witness of

the saints. It is clear that this problem still exists today.

The Second Vatican Council recovered this idea of the Church as a "synod", that was in place at the origins of the Church, defining it as **the "People of God" made up of the baptized who have received the gift of the Spirit and are on a pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God.**

This means that what all Christians have in common (the gift of the Spirit received in baptism) is more important than the different vocations of pastors, lay people and religious life: differences that are not eliminated, but rather put into practice, in dialogue and communion.

We all have the right to speak and listen to each other to discern what is best for the Church, from our own experience & vocation. And the religious family of Betharram cannot be alien to this openness. We Betharramites gathered in the General Chapter of Chang Mai allowed ourselves to be challenged by the cry of Isaiah: *Enlarge the space of your tent, unfold your canvas with generosity, lengthen your ropes, strengthen your stakes!* (Is. 54, 2-3).

Thus a renewed hope is born: the dream that many brothers and sisters will walk in communion with us, pilgrims of the Kingdom of God. This is the synodal Church.

*Pope Francis says that synodality is the style of the Church of the 21st century.*

The first part of the synod, recently concluded, has asked that we conform to the ecclesiology of Vatican II. It has reminded us that the Church *learns* by walking alongside the People of God. There have already been two years of process and preparation with the diocesan and continental stages. We are a Church in the midst of a changing era, which feels like a bearer of hope.

The Holy Father insists that synodality is not a fashion that breaks with the past, but rather that *it must occur in creative continuity with ecclesial tradition*. It is not about advancing capriciously and without direction, but about joining the pilgrimage of all humanity by being witnesses of faith in Christ. Walk together, not only among Christians, but with all human beings.

In a synodal Church, humanity is conceived as "a work in progress."



“ O my God, You have so loved me!  
O God, You have done so much to obtain  
my love.  
You have so desired and do so desire that I  
love You!  
Here I am, O my God, here I am.  
My heart is ready, I will stop at nothing to  
prove to You my love.  
What do you want me to do? Here I am. ”

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Michael Garicoits, let us be,  
Betharramite Religious & Lay associates united in prayer.

■ The Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín SCJ, convened the Council of the Congregation at the General House in Rome from November 27 to December 2, 2023. Besides the members of the General Council, the three new Regional Superiors, Fr. Simone Panzeri SCJ (SMG Region), Fr. Davi Da Silva Lara SCJ (FrAE Region), Fr. Wilfred Poulouse Pereppadan SCJ (SMJC Region) were present. The General Councillors, Fr. Stervin Fernando Selvadass SCJ and Fr. Chan John Kunu SCJ, participated by video conference.



During this Council of Congregation, several topics were discussed. The first of which was to allow the Regional Superiors (all "novices") to tell their first months of service in the Regions.



It was then sought to identify the essential points on which to focus attention in 2024, including: formation and formators, the Betharramite Formation Team, sharing of the goods and the 2022 audit, the theme to be proposed for 2024, the session for final profession in Betharram and a proposal for the meeting of the formators.

■ The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, meeting on December 2, authorized the purchase of a house in Nottingham (Vicariate of England) as the residence of the community.

■ The Betharramita Formation Team will be meeting in Rome from 29 January to 3 February 2024.

*In the Peace of the Lord*

Italy | Mr Tarcisio Pensa, 89, brother of Fr Alberto Pensa SCJ, of the community of Ban Pong (Vicariate of Thailand) died on November 19. We convey our condolences to Fr Alberto SCJ, and we promise to keep him, his dear brother, and his family members in our prayer.



Starting from what we all are, pilgrims of this world journeying towards the Father, we ask ourselves: *Who walks by our side, why does he walk, what does he seek?*

Living synodality means walking with others along *the right path*. Listen, talk, dialogue, decide together, celebrate shared life. All of this implies recreating communion in all environments. Make this desire for communion contagious and reach all of humanity, the family of the daughters and sons of God.

A method has been used in the synod meetings that has borne many fruits. **The method of conversation in the Spirit.** When we meet to discern together, it is very difficult for us to leave behind our preconceived ideas, comforts, personal, cultural, and social differences. It *takes us a while* to get going. Furthermore, when it comes to making a path, we want guarantees, to proceed safely, *outlining* the route ourselves. "*Conversation in the spirit*" invites us to prioritise respectful and prayerful listening. For this method to be effective, personal prayer is a necessary condition. In addition, we must welcome the diversity of opinions as a richness. And learn to appreciate the eventual "challenges" as an opportunity.

*Some significant contents of the Synod:*

- Promote conversation in the Spirit as a method of our meetings.
- Continuity with the Vatican II vision of "The people of God" .
- Live synodality, deepen communion.
- Discernment and search for consensus (it must be recovered) (but this is not the same thing as democracy).
- Be present on the peripheries of our church and our world.
- Diakonia: service to the poor.
- Fight against latent or overt racism. Commitment to racial justice.
- Mutual collaboration between all Christians.
- Women in the Church.

A religious from the synod told us: "*Although sometimes people listen with prejudice (and though sometimes things are said that have not been considered, and we have to stop to meditate on what has been shared), I am convinced that this stage of the synodal path is guiding us to an accumulation of riches unknown to most of the participants. It is the Church in its diversity that, anointed by the Holy Spirit, is letting the call to convert and leave ourselves resonate within itself.*"

Today the church needs prophetic voices and concrete actions. Renew hope in a God who loves us, despite everything that happens, our struggles and contradictions. Those voices are needed by so many people who suffer, and who are excluded, ignored, and have no voice in this society of consumption and well-being, in this inert humanity in the face of climate change, migration, senseless wars.

I would like to finish with a thought from Fr. Codina sj:

*“The Church is not a pyramid, but a community, where each Christian fulfills his mission, as a pastor, layman or religious life. There should not be a cultural, spiritual or clerical elite that dominates from above, but rather we all participate in the same faith and the gift of the Spirit. Thus, what affects us all should be discussed by all.*

*And all of this must be open and dynamic, since the synodal Church is a People on the move that must announce the gospel of Jesus to all nations, and respond to the joys and hopes, sadness and anguish of humanity today. This is the synodality that Pope Francis proposes for the Church of the 21st century.”*

I wish you many blessings on this path with the People of God towards a new Christmas and a new year. May the Lord find us in 2024 “more **united** and not just gathered.”

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**  
Superior General

#### Questions for community reflection:

- How does this proposal for a 21st century synodal Church resonate with you?
- What attitude do you have towards those who are different, those who do not think like you, those who come from somewhere else..., etc?
- Has your community taken any steps to express this new synodal age proposed by the Church? In what way?

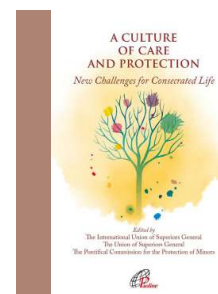
into a law of omerta imposed by the abuser. At the same time, they presented the different stages of the canonical investigation concerning people suspected of abuse that the Congregations must also support, and this is not without its problems.

This session can only encourage us to promote a culture of safeguarding which must be deployed at all levels of the Congregation: General Council, Region, Vicariate and Community.

Fighting against the law of silence and denial, supporting victims and abusers alike, making visible the full reality of different forms of abuse in different cultural environments,

knowing the civil and criminal laws of the country, are all points to consider by all for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. We must implement “The guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable people” that Father Gustavo Agin, Superior General, gave, by decree, on March 19, 2021. Also motion no. 6 of our 2023 General Chapter strongly commits us to this. (cf. art.196-199)

It is a grace to work on the culture of safeguarding. Our charism can support us in this: we are called to live with availability, respect, cordiality, tenderness and joy. ■



*This book, given at the meeting and produced by the Unions of Superiors General (USG & UISG) and the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, is available in Italian and English.*

*Intended for the formation of religious men and women, and more specifically as superiors and delegates for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, this publication is a contribution to the human growth of every member of consecrated life in the Church.*

*The questions and suggestions of those who survived abuse are the starting point for a necessary reflection within and outside religious communities.*

*The voices of cardinals, bishops, religious and laity alternate in these pages,*

*demonstrating that only a common response can result in new paths of action that will make the Church a safe environment for all.*

#### Other notices

■ On 17 November, the Superior General and the Bursar General met in videoconference with the Regional Bursars, Fr. Gerard Zugarramurdi SCJ (SMG Region), Fr. Tobia Sosio SCJ (PAE Region) and Fr. Bithu Pitak SCJ (SMJC Region).



## Towards a culture of Safeguarding

| Fr. Jean-Do Delgue scj



**As a representative of the General Council to the “Commission for Care and Safeguarding” (set up by the unions of Superiors General: UISG and USG), Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj, Vicar General, took part in a 5-day session in November themed on: “Creating a culture of Safeguarding”.**

We met in November, (130 religious men and women from 5 continents and 90 Congregations) to reflect and discern how to create a culture of safeguarding. It was a fruitful time of sharing, thanks to the great diversity of cultures and the expressed desire of the Congregations to fully engage in the fight against abuse of minors and vulnerable adults: nothing can excuse us from the priority and the obligation to protect them.

This week was led by religious and lay people who are committed to the prevention of abuse in their Congregations and who are in contact with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. The testimony of 2 victims was a powerful moment of listening and emotion. Reading a testimony is already gripping; listening to a testimony

is overwhelming!... as the suffering of the victim is always present. One of the victims told us: “The abuser’s power does not disappear when he dies.”

The different contributions of the speakers described the many methods and mechanisms of grooming and manipulation, so that we could learn to prevent certain attitudes or ways of behaviour among people who accompany minors and vulnerable people.

It must be recognized that the pastoral relationships that everyone experiences are a space of great vulnerability which can encourage abusive relationships. Because, in a pastoral relationship, there is the one who accompanies and the one who is accompanied. So there is, in fact already, an imbalance of power. Real support requires respect, freedom, and the right distance. Otherwise, support can become an abuse of power which can also lead to sexual abuse.

The speakers strongly urged us to know how to listen, welcome, support and give confidence to victims who have been trapped

## Homily • Conclusion of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, St Peter’s Basilica, Sunday 29 October 2023



[...]. “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (Mt 22:36). We too, immersed in the living stream of Tradition, can ask: “What is the most important thing? What is the driving force?” What matters so much as to be the guiding principle of everything? Jesus’ answer is clear: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39).

Loving God with our whole life and loving our neighbour as ourselves. Not our strategies, our human calculations, the ways of the world, but love of God and neighbour: that is the heart of everything. And how do we channel this momentum of love? I would propose two verbs, two movements of the heart, on which I would like to reflect: to adore and to serve. We love God through adoration and service.

The first verb, adore. To love is to adore. Adoration is the first response we can offer to God’s gratuitous and astonishing love. The amazement of adoration, the wonder of worship, is something essential in the life of the Church, especially in our own day in which we have abandoned the practice of adoration. To adore God

means to acknowledge in faith that he alone is Lord and that our individual lives, the Church’s pilgrim way and the ultimate outcome of history all depend on the tenderness of his love. He gives meaning to our lives.

In worshipping God, we rediscover that we are free. That is why the Scriptures frequently associate love of the Lord with the fight against every form of idolatry. Those who worship God reject idols because whereas God liberates, idols enslave. Idols deceive us and never bring to pass what they promise, because they are “the work of men’s hands” (Ps 115:4). Scripture is unbending with regard to idolatry, because idols are made and manipulated by men, while God, the Living God, is present and transcendent; he is the one “who is not what I imagine him to be, who does not depend on what I expect from him and who can thus upset my expectations, precisely because he is alive. The proof that we do not always have the right idea about God is that at times we are disappointed: We think: ‘I expected one thing, I imagined that God would behave like this, and instead I was wrong’. But in this way, we turn back to the path of idolatry, wanting the Lord to act according to the image we have

of him" (C.M. Martini, *I grandi della Bibbia. Esercizi spirituali con l'Antico Testamento*, Florence, 2022, 826-827). We are always at risk of thinking that we can "control God", that we can confine his love to our own agenda. Instead, the way he acts is always unpredictable, it transcends our thinking, and God's way of acting consequently demands amazement and adoration. Amazement is very important!

We must constantly struggle against all types of idolatry; not only the worldly kinds, which often stem from vain glory, such as lust for success, self-centredness, greed for money – let us not forget that the devil enters "through the pockets", the enticements of careerism; but also those forms of idolatry disguised as spirituality – my own spirituality: my own religious ideas, my own pastoral skills... Let us be vigilant, lest we find that we are putting ourselves at the centre rather than him. And let us return to worship. May worship be central for those of us who are pastors: let us devote time every day to intimacy with Jesus the Good Shepherd, adoring him in the tabernacle. May the Church adore: in every diocese, in every parish, in every community, let us adore the Lord! Only in this way will we turn to Jesus and not to ourselves. [...]

The second verb is to serve. To love is to serve. In the great commandment, Christ binds God and neighbour together so that they will never be disconnected. There can be no true religious experience that is deaf to the cry of the world. There is no love of

God without care and concern for our neighbour; otherwise, we risk becoming pharisaic. We may have plenty of good ideas on how to reform the Church, but let us remember: to adore God and to love our brothers and sisters with his love, that is the great and perennial reform. To be a worshipping Church and a Church of service, washing the feet of wounded humanity, accompanying those who are frail, weak and cast aside, going out lovingly to encounter the poor. We heard in the first reading how God commanded this.

[...]

Brothers and sisters, the General Assembly of the Synod has now concluded. In this "conversation of the Spirit," we have experienced the loving presence of the Lord and discovered the beauty of fraternity. We have listened to one another and above all, in the rich variety of our backgrounds and concerns, we have listened to the Holy Spirit. Today we do not see the full fruit of this process, but with farsightedness we look to the horizon opening up before us. The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.

[...] To adore and to serve. May the Lord accompany us. Let us go forward with joy! ■

economy of communion becomes a reality only to the extent that each one contributes.

Fortunately, our superiors are not as demanding as Peter was in his time with Ananias (Acts 5:1-5). However, we understand and can experience the joy of that servant who wisely used the resources entrusted to him and was praised by the king: "*Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities*" (Luke 19:17).

Certainly, we do not seek or need praise; we aspire only to the beatitude of the one who wants to be part of the Kingdom (Matthew 5:3).

Administrative matters are not the most important thing in religious life, and even less so for the priestly ministry. We can say the same in the life of a family. We have not been sufficiently trained to handle numbers and balance sheets. But individual handling of resources, often selfish and even scandalous in the eyes of the humble faithful, cannot be justified. Transparency is the characteristic of simple people and certainly the secret to walking with confidence, all together, with the opportunity of helping others less fortunate.

I am often asked how the Vicariate of Paraguay can contribute so much to the Formation Fund. There are no big secrets: simply, each work (school) reports its income and expenses monthly, establishes its

annual budget, and is supervised in its faithful implementation. We often meet among all administrators for an evaluation, suggestions, and projects. In this sense, the collaboration of qualified lay people is fundamental. Where we previously recorded heavy debts, we now record good surpluses.

We could apply the same strategy at the community level. It is beautiful to walk together; it gives the assurance of walking on solid ground. We can continue to dream and see that the dream becomes reality: "*We have ears sensitive to the cries of the world, eyes capable of seeing beyond appearances*" (Acts no. 138).

The economy is not the main factor, but when it is the fruit and a contribution to communion, then it becomes part of the talents that God has placed in our hands, and of which He will ask us to give an account. ■



110 and 111).

The following texts provide beautiful suggestions and directions that, if adopted and lived out in communities, will undoubtedly bear fruit. A little further on, paragraph 148 (and following) brings us back to reality: the sharing of goods for the Mission.

Our Rule of Life, in presenting the vow and virtue of evangelical Poverty, warns us: "*Lived with loyalty, [poverty] prevents us from hurting our brothers and being a cause of outrage; it contributes to the fraternal atmosphere.*" (RdV 49). It is evident that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to walk together if we – each religious that we are – do not assume with sincerity and coherence the responsibility for the administration of our goods, in a "synodal" style, i.e., with openness, transparency, listening, and sharing, defining the "economy of communion." This is how the early Christian communities lived: "*Now the multitude of those*

*who believed were of one heart and one soul; and no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 4:32). I am convinced that among themselves there lived a profound joy, besides the beautiful testimony they offered to the eyes of the pagan world, which could witness that "none of them was needy" (Acts 4:34).*

On 17th November, the Regional Treasurers, of which I am one, gathered for a first virtual meeting with the General Bursar to help us advance what the Congregation, organized in Regions, expects from us. The Rule of Life clearly defines the function of each Treasurer at different levels: community, vicariate, region, general. But everything starts from below: if the religious does not communicate his income and expenses, the community treasurer cannot develop a budget, which should be approved by the Vicariate and the Region. And so on: the

•\• Main themes for reflection •/\•



## Experiences of synodality



Synodality, journeying together: the Gospel of today

| Fr. Jacob Bisop Paliampally scj

Synodality literally mean; "journeying together as the people of God." As it means so, it invites us to have two natures in us. They are the nature of God and the nature of (people) human being. What does it mean to have nature of God? It means to have the ability to listen, feel empathy, showing compassion, expressing merciful gestures etc.... as Jesus Christ Our Lord showed and lived in His earthly life. Human nature is fragile and weak but it can be made strong by persona; prayers, meditation and above all by Holy Eucharist. Keeping these two natures which are innate in human being at the back of our mind, let us go the depths of our missions at Hojai, Langting and Simaluguri the face of Betharram.

The aim of our apostolate according to St. Michael Garicoits is;

"to sanctify oneself, to strive for one's personal perfection, such is the central aim of religious life. Sanctify others without ceasing to sanctify ourselves, there is the proper character of our Society." Here each Betharramite is asked to keep in one hand the nature of God and on the other hand strive for self sanctity. Therefore according to me Betharram mission is very clearly and purely reflecting, Synodality Journeying together; the Gospel of today.

Our missions at Hojai and Simaluguri have two faces, such as Education ministry and Parish ministry.

**Hojai** mission centre got three villages with five tribes of people namely: Adivasi, Garo, Karbi, Kasi and Manipuri. Fathers Edwin and Jestine at present are very active in imparting



the gospel values through education ministry and parish ministry. Every day both fathers along with the teachers take classes in the school, they mainly focus themselves in the school to give moral values to the students by taking moral science classes, arranging different value oriented programmes with the help of Sacred Heart Sisters and Notre Dame Sisters. They also go to their villages for Holy Eucharistic Celebration, house visits flood and other natural calamity relief, spends time with sick and suffering. In all these actions they present the face of Christ by journeying together with the people.

**Simaluguri** the face of Betharram mission in Assam is young and vibrant mission with eight villages and four tribes namely; Adivasi, Garo, Theeva and Bodo. Fathers Satheesh, Akhil and Dn. Pobitro never failed to be the face of God to these people. There too we could experience

God's presence and the Gospel values reverberating on the air. In the school our fathers vibrantly impart the moral values through different classes. On the other hand our school was the flood relief camp for the people for one month. They stayed in our campus and experienced the presence of God. Our fathers visit the villages regularly celebrate the Holy Eucharist, organise different leadership programme for the people, train them for their spiritual, social and economic developments with the help of Missionary Sisters of Incarnation. The spiritual aura or our fathers is experienced and changed the people. For example those who were opposing our presence at Simaluguri are now our friends and their children are studying in our school. The development and growth in our community and the entire area is another example which no one can deny. These two missions, Hojai and Simaluguri are under the Arch

of the Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region and Fr. Gérard Zugarramurdi scj, Regional Bursar and the Saint Michel Garicoïts Region.

This first meeting aimed to review in detail the role and task of a Regional Bursar and the close correlation that exists between the Regions. The Congregation is like a body in which each member must take care of each other in a responsible and subsidiary manner.

All this is the basis of what we call sharing. Without forgetting that the Congregation exists in communities, in which each religious with responsibility, lives his consecration by pooling goods.

Our poverty is not a pure deprivation of something, nor a form of miserable life, but it is defined by dependence. In a culture that exalts possession, success and economic independence, our life wants to bear

witness to something else, namely the sharing of goods with a view to a mission that the Church entrusts to us through the discernment of our Superiors. ...

Bursars, at all levels, must remind us of this. And they must remind everyone to ensure that all religious have the means to carry out the mission entrusted to them.

What we experienced (in November) was only the first meeting in a series to come... The goal was not to treat all the subjects in depth, but to lay the foundations of this new journey to which the Chapter has given us renewed impetus.

Starting a new path can sometimes be scary. But as we walk together, we can face the dangers together... ■



## Walking together in an Economy of Communion

| Fr. Tobia Sosio scj

The title of the third part of the Acts of the recent General Chapter challenges and inspires us simultaneously: "Let's walk together!" It urges us to abandon our forms of immobility and dangerous

individualisms, and to dream enthusiastically of "meaningful, open, welcoming communities where dialogue takes place, which bear witness and attract," embracing "synodality as a way of life" (Acts no.



•\• On-going formation •/\•



A new path...

| Fr. Graziano Sala scj

The General Chapter, celebrated in Chiang Mai last June, invited the whole Congregation to take a step forward.

Among the many subjects highlighted, it once again focused in the "Sharing of goods with a view to the mission".

To give what was written about the sharing of goods the possibility of being put into practice, it was requested that there be greater co-responsibility (among the many actions indicated) between the Superior General, (highest authority within the Congregation), the

Acts of the General Chapter 2023  
on "The sharing of the goods for the mission"  
[Proposals...]

157 | At the General level (role of the General Bursar)  
The General Chapter requests that over the next six years, three meetings are held either in person or virtually between the regional Bursars, the General Bursar and the Superior general :  
**a) at the start of the mandate: to know the realities of each Region...**

General Bursar and the Regional Bursars.

The purpose of this common task of co-responsibility is always to help each other, reciprocally, to live as the Rule of Life (no. 49) asks us .. which each Betharramite has committed to live:

*"Through the religious vow of poverty, we undertake to possess nothing: we pool our material goods, our human and spiritual values.*

*The pooling of goods forces us to depend (...) for their use. (...) This dependence (...) lived with loyalty, [...] makes it possible to avoid hurting the brothers and being the cause of scandal; it contributes to the fraternal climate.*

*We consciously use community assets to the extent that they are necessary for mission. Our fraternal life is marked by sobriety and simplicity, self-sacrifice and hospitality."*

This is why, on November 17, a meeting took place, by videoconference, between Fr. Gustavo Agín scj, Superior General, Fr. Graziano Sala scj, General Bursar, Fr. Tobia Sosio scj, Regional Bursar of the Region P. Auguste Etchecopar, Fr. Bi-thu Pitak scj, Regional Bursar

Diocese of Guwahati. All four fathers are very regular to the Diocesan Priestly gathering, monthly recollections, confessions and adoration.



**Langting** is located at Dima Hasao district. The Dimahasao tribe is very peculiar that does not accept any religion. They do not have any religious practice, thus at Langting only education ministry is possible. Along with Franciscan Clarist Congregation sister, Fathers Valan and Jacob try to make an impact on the people's life. The moral value class and other developmental works helped us to bring their attention to our life style. At present some of the people are coming to participate in the Holy Eucharist (Non Christians). Our house visits started to bring fruits. The people come to us to speak about their problems. A listening ear rendered to them is a great consolation. Silently listening yet powerfully we are preaching the gospel. People started to change from their destructive nature to creative and contributing nature. The transformation we see at present in our mission centre, started from within. The following words of St. Michael Garicoits changed us. "A missionary must be ready to face

*any trial which is unavoidable in his sublime ministry. He may be given damp clothes, or badly prepared food. He should then say to himself: I have made profession to follow my Divine Master right to the Cross."*

**Our life style here at North East of Assam** is very simple but very strongly communicating the Gospel Values and face of Christ. In all the three centres our life begins with Morning Adoration, Breviary prayer together, Holy Eucharistic Celebration. This part strengthens us to put on the face of Christ to the people. With that face of Christ we move to the school ministry teaching, caring that way showing the compassionate face of Jesus, listening to the students, encouraging the weak, asking the intelligent students to teach others. In this way we show them the need to cordiality and co-existence. After the class hours we work with the hostel students and play with them. We visit houses that

are nearby and meet the people who come to our centre. Evening with the domestic helpers, hostel students and fathers we pray Rosary. Fathers spend time of personal prayer and meditation while hostel students concentrate in their studies.

In conclusion, I am sure about all the priests and brothers who did and are doing ministry in the North East of Assam are aware of the following:

“Believe what you read  
Preach what you read and  
Practice what you preach.”

Thus they journeyed and are journeying together as the people of God, the gospel of today, the Synodality. Everything for the greater glory of God. ■



### A brief note for sharing on the route taken by Lay Betharramites in the Vicariate of Brazil

| Fr. Francisco de Assis Dos Santos scj

*“You are the salt of the earth. [...] You are a light to the world.” (Mt 5: 13-14).*

That was how Jesus, when talking to his disciples, defined the mission He was entrusting to them. It is of particular significance in these times, especially when applied to the lay Christian, to lay people in the Church and in our Betharramite family.

In this beautiful Gospel passage and in these symbols of salt and light, we see how rewarding it is to share these gifts and charism, as Saint Michael Garicoits said when he spoke of the importance of *“procuring the same happiness for others”* (DS).

For some years now we have been treading a goodly path, marked out for us by our Participation and Mission Group, in partnership with the laity in Brazil. From

the many wonderful experiences gained in sharing our Betharramite spirituality while journeying together, I would choose just a few events from the last couple of years.

The Meeting of Lay Betharramites was held on 15, 16 and 17 July 2022 at Passa Quatro, the Congregation’s Brazilian Mother House. After two years of restrictions due to the pandemic in which face-to-face meetings were impossible, the joy of seeing one another again and being able to share about our life and mission was great, but so too was the sadness at the challenges raised during these lockdown periods because of the disappearance of so many close lay friends and of their friends and relations.

At all these events we were able to rely on the participation of lay people



observed all of this during this time and it also motivated me to want to respond by making those examples come to life in me.

For me, this response of ‘Here I am’ was always a challenge, because it brought with it an emptying of oneself, a loss, at times, of my comfort zone. The Betharramite Here I am is a “Yes” from love and an impulse to give love, whether in service, in helping others, in the work that has been entrusted to us.

This is my decisive response: to say Here I am without delay, without reservation, forever. And all this because in my life I felt and feel the love of God that drives me to say Yes, as a part of this religious family, in which I take the pathway that God had always marked out for me. ■

**Brother Thiago made his perpetual profession in the hands of Fr. Davi Lara SCJ, Regional Superior, delegate of the Superior General, on 7 December in the parish of Inmaculada Concepción in Gavião (State of Bahía, Brazil).**

**Brother Oscar will pronounce his perpetual vows next December 20 in the parish of San José in Asunción (Paraguay), in the hands of Fr. Davi Lara SCJ.**

We join in union of prayers for their fidelity and perseverance.



I am **Br. Oscar Alberto Mendoza Jiménez, scj.** I am Brother Oscar Alberto Mendoza Jiménez, scj. The older of two brothers. My mother was already deceased when

I came to knock on the door of the Congregation just after she passed away. My first contact with Betharram was through Father Fulgencio Ferreira, parish priest at that time, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Ciudad del Este.

I became part of the religious family of Betharram in 2014, beginning my discernment in the formation house of Lambaré, where I received human and spiritual accompaniment, above all support because I was in a very difficult place in my life. I was struggling with inner turmoil and my faith was very weak. In Betharram I found not only a family that supported me but also brothers who encouraged me to follow this path.

In the first stage of my formation I learned to know and be enthusiastic about the charism and spirituality that our founding father bequeathed to the Betharramite family. I was motivated from the beginning

by that generous impulse that a Betharramite is called to live, to say not only with one's words but with one's life. 'Here I am, without delay, without reservation'.... and at this point in my life I add to this, 'forever'.

This generous impulse of a Betharramite to say "Yes" by following Jesus in a particular way, trying to imitate him, consists for me, above all, in this fact of imitating, I would say, trying to live as closely as possible what Jesus lived... mainly his obedience to the Father, to whom he was always prepared to respond without delay and without reservation. This spirit that Jesus witnessed and that Saint Michael Garicoits desired for the Betharram family inspired me to want to discern my religious life to carry out the project that God has always had for me and to which today I am responding with my "Yes" forever. ; with my "Yes" to be part of this family that I feel is where God wants me to serve and write my story as a Betharramite, at the service of the Church.

That "Here I am" of Saint Michael, which I began to nurture as an aspirant and postulant, and then deepened in the novitiate and the scholasticate, became embodied in my daily life. It grew in me and became part of my being in my journey through the different formation houses. I found it even in the witness of the religious brothers who with their lives wrote and clearly expressed 'Here I Am', availability, service, dedication. I

from the communities in Belo Horizonte, Sabara and Passa Quatro as well as on that of Frs Paulo Vital scj and Sebastian Do Nascimento scj, who helped us and added greatly to the proceedings through their sharing and witness of consecrated life, as well as their missionary experiences. Both greatly enriched the encounter by their presence.

The theme we chose for this encounter was that adopted by the Congregation that year (2022): *"Go out to meet one another, to listen and to discern... together"*, making use and adapting the resources proposed by the 2021 Council of the Congregation for all religious and laity associated with today's mission of Betharram.

The meeting took place in an atmosphere of great joy, the listening attentive, thoughtful and receptive; the discernment profound and open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; no attempt was made to disguise current reality in terms of what is facing our mission and how we promote our charism.

In 2023, it has sadly not been possible to organise a general encounter with

all the laity from our communities and parishes in the Vicariate of Brazil, but in a Spirit of Synodality, uniting Participation, Communion and Mission, we have managed to nonetheless remain a connected community thanks to social media, setting up a WhatsApp group and thereby sharing mission-related events and activities led in each locality, according to the particular requirements of each Betharramite community.

Finally, in the light of these many events, it is remarkable that in spite of the distances that separate us and the challenges we face, Brazil's Lay Betharramites still continue to follow our mission and, in a deep desire to be in communion, to drink from the same spring, joyfully sharing our spirituality and charism, faithfully and willingly.

Let us pray that the Lord, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, may continue to guide our Lay Betharramites and, with the Blessing of Our Lady of the Beautiful Branch and the intercession of Saint Michael Garicoits, may thereby further increase the strength of our community and our mission. ■





•\• The life of the congregation •/\•

Toward the final profession of two brothers of the Vicariate of Brazil and the Vicariate of Paraguay



I am **Br. Antonio Thiago Gordiano Sampaio scj**. I am 36 years old and was born in 1987 in the city of Conceição do Coité, in the interior of the state of Bahia, northeast Brazil. My family follows the Catholic tradition, and it is within my family that I learned the first pillars of faith. Over the years, I attended catechesis in the Cristo Rei community, in the neighbourhood where I lived with my family. From a very young age, I participated in the activities of this community and those of the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* parish. Over the years, this participation extended to catechesis activities offered by the diocese. I experienced an initial vocational calling, and was accompanied by a diocesan priest. At that time, I enrolled in the history faculty.

At the end of my university studies, I worked for several years as a teacher, remaining involved in church activities. Betharram entered my life in 2015 when the Congregation took charge of a mission in the Serrinha diocese, my original diocese. Through a nun from the Providence of GAP, a friend of the Betharramite priests who were taking over the mission at that time, I began to frequent the religious community, and gradually certain aspects caught my attention. The simple and sincere welcome of the religious is the first thing I would like to emphasize. Their house was open to everyone, and moments of sharing were numerous; I was struck by their availability and their willingness to serve. I gradually understood that this simplicity and love for mission originated from the charismatic sources of the Congregation. After a few months, I decided to ask the Congregation for guidance on a vocational discernment journey. Since then, I have followed the stages of initial formation, culminating this year in perpetual profession.

Imitating the virtues of the Sacred



Heart of Jesus, contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, and the call for Betharramites to embody the realities they are called to live, even those where no one wants to go; discovering that everything we do in mission must be done out of love; sharing with others the joy of consecration. All these aspects of the charism of our religious family caught my attention from the beginning and in the early years of initial formation. They remain to this day the foundations that support my vocation as a Betharramite religious.

Throughout my training, I always noticed the welcoming attitude of all the religious in the communities I passed through. I felt respected and supported throughout the training process. The novitiate marked an important step in deepening the understanding of

our charism; the time spent reading the writings of Saint Michael and the history of the early years of the Congregation was crucial, as was the experience of the Spiritual Exercises during the canonical year. I also think of the time in the scholasticate because studying theology was a desire I had held for a long time. It was a period of great joy and fulfilment in terms of studies. I cannot fail to mention the openness and encouragement for apostolate and pastoral care that were offered at the same time so that, in the training process, you do not lose contact with reality and people.

In conclusion, I would like to thank God and the Congregation for the journey travelled and for this significant step I take in my life as a religious. ■