

Fr. Etchecopar writing to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth,
Daughter of the Charity, Betharram, 14 February 1868.

Oh! dear sheep of Our Lord, this is what should give you courage, confidence, imperturbable peace in the midst of all the exterior and interior storms, in the midst of all the assaults of the world and of hell, in the midst of all your failings! It is to be fascinated by the thought of the eternal, infinite love of this good Shepherd, of his continual solicitude, of his eye always open, of his heart always poured out for us, directing everything, regulating everything, turning everything to the satisfaction of his fatherly love, to the greater good of his children. Hence this practice of the great saints. Saint Francis de Sales said: "The one who understands all, is the one who desires only to please God.

1° To remain unshakeable in this resolution to remain in the presence of God, by an entire stripping and surrender of ourselves into the arms of his most holy will, and whenever we find our spirit outside of this pleasant abode, bring it back gently.

2° To remain thus, without thinking of our soul, of our poor nature, whether it is satisfied now; or whether it will be later; without thinking of ourselves either in the present or in the future, of what is happening to us or will happen to us, for what are these returns to ourselves if not miserable consolations of self-love?

3° So do not deliberately reason about our own consolations or afflictions, but let us throw our heart and mind unceasingly into the bosom of the Paternal Will; saying to everything: Yes, Father, because you wanted it. And if we see any care or desire arising within us, let us suddenly divest ourselves of it and hand it over to God, protesting that we only want him and the fulfillment of his Good Pleasure." St. Francis de Sales.



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A word from the superior general

Living in chastity: walking joyfully and wounded by love

"A tried and tested means of strengthening those delicate virtues of faith and purity would be to continually apply oneself to doing ordinary actions well."
(DS § 81- St Michael Garicoits)

Dear Betharramites,

The children of Saint Michael Garicoits of yesterday and today have assumed, through a vow, a great challenge for the Kingdom of God. We will never be able to "get used to" having the gift of chastity..., but neither is it a matter of hiding it underground; whether we live it intensely, a little less, or even with great difficulty. In any case, the People of God, to which we belong, gives us its trust and always expects our witness.

Living in chastity will mean for us, among other things, assuming the wound of our tendency to exclusivity in love and tenderness. Walking, wounded by love is not easy, because

it implies a lot of self-knowledge, the acceptance of one's own limits and, above all, a constant self-giving. Many brothers live it with joy and hope, because they feel that they are on the right path, the one that Jesus himself lovingly proposed to them.

The vow of chastity, pronounced before the Lord and his Church, affects the core of our Betharramite charism as *apostolic religious life*. We know that we are not monks, we are ordinary men 'wounded' with love.

How much those brothers who have understood that living chastity means re-positioning oneself affectively in a new and definitive way, since they entered religious life, edify me! Said in other words: that following Christ means prophetically *leaving "father, mother and brothers" as he did*, even if this causes a vacuum; and open oneself to all with a sincere and generous love, to create new bonds in Christ. These detached and chaste Betharramites have always characterised us, and have meant that, by definition, our communities are not cold or indifferent. The respect of the laity and religious who collaborate in the different communities where we live helps a lot! More than once a timely fraternal correction of a lay person has helped a priest/religious to find his pathway...

Through baptism we share the same vocation, which is an invitation to cultivate fraternity and friendship in Christ, with small daily gestures that make us feel close to one another even though we are very different.

Our constitutions say, speaking of the vow of chastity: *We need sufficient maturity and affective balance to truly fulfil ourselves. This allows us, in fraternal life in community, to overcome the conflicts inherent in all community life, to live healthy solitude and care for our brothers.*

Saint Michael wanted Betharramites to practice "cordial respect and respectful cordiality" (DS § 157)" (cf. RL. 37).

Indeed, this vow fully affects our affective capacity, our sense of boundaries and our ability to offer tenderness in an exclusive way. Well lived, in full freedom of spirit, it brings out in each brother a depth comparable to that of sacramental marriage, which expresses the union of Christ with his Church.

It is true that most people do not grasp the meaning of all this. Since

out. Often today it is also the case that the paths to reach Jesus and meet Him are blocked. Some caring friends of the paralytic, however, have the good idea of bringing him down through the roof, in the centre of the room, before Jesus, so that He may heal him.

Like the crowd in Capernaum, we would have liked Him not only to say to the paralytic and to Father Enrico "your sins are forgiven," but also to heal him. We would like the Lord to always do our will, to grant our desires, but he heals us first of all "within," in the mind and in the heart; he takes away evil and sin to give us a new life, like His, made of trust in the Father in heaven and of watchful and considerate attention to our brethren.

This is also the situation that characterized Father Enrico's life. Taken by loving hands to the "Centre" of many of our religious communities – Monteporzio, Albavilla, Valsola, and then for the past 20 years in Albavilla, Fr. Enrico, placed before the Lord and inspired by Him, has always had pulling power. He was a centre of attention because of the sympathy he expressed and showed in many ways: by his famous sayings, by the singing, by the little things he did that had an impact which lasted much longer than words.

Fr. Enrico's life was also a providential inspiration and a call to true brotherhood, willed and taught by Jesus, a call to loving attention to the weakest, the most fragile, those who are sometimes unable to

communicate, like the paralytic before the Lord Jesus.

Physical paralysis did not prevent him from living a joyful, happy life, punctuated by his songs of a melody without words, sung with the voice of the heart.

Disability did not deprive him of the ability to make small gestures, to express his gratitude to those who assisted him: by, quite simply, giving a cut-out photo, a religious image, a newspaper clipping. [...]

Father Enrico will be greatly missed! I believe that he will be missed by all those who knew him and who will remember him as a person, a priest, unlucky because of his physical disabilities, but as able as Job to endure calmly, without losing trust in the Lord – trust that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Ephesians in the Second Reading – and by continuing to sing from the heart and thirst for the Living God that burned in his soul.

"Thank you, in heaven, ciao!": it was the triptych of words that he could pronounce best and that he kept repeating. In the hospital, tired, he would dismiss the person who visited him and say, "Go to bed, bye-bye!" (meaning, "I'm tired, let me rest.")

«Ciao» Fr. Enrico! "Go to bed," sleep now in the arms of the Father. Forever!

(From the homily of Fr. Piero Trameri Scj for the funeral of Fr. Enrico Mariani)

discomfort he found himself in, his hand was attached to this beautiful branch which was outstretched to him here at Betharram. Until his last day, he remained faithful in praying the rosary. Despite the distance, Betharram remained his family.

For seven and a half years, he had been reunited to Betharram where he felt fully welcome by the community of this house, happy to regain a prodigal son. And Betharram became for him the resting place of his heart, thanks to you and to everyone who made his return possible. It would be good to also mention all the very considerate staff, especially throughout these past two years, when he had lost a lot of independence. He showed himself to be a resident who knew how to adapt flexibly to the different regulations of the house, which had been the rule for you over the past two years.

Father Enrico MARIANI scj

Lissone, 1st August 1941 - Albavilla, 29 January 2023
(Italia)

Let us bow to the mystery of a priestly life (that of Fr Enrico Mariani, who passed away on 29 January last), lived for four years in an active ministry, then marked by illness, disability, pain and suffering for fifty years.

We bow before the will of the Lord. In order to serve Him, and to arrive in time to celebrate the Eucharist, Father Enrico fell accidentally into the bottom of a ravine in the mountains of Valsolda, receiving assistance and comfort only

A further sign from God to celebrate Pierre's funeral on the feast of St Francis de Sales, who built his spirituality on the love and mercy of God, this Father God "who has the strength not to force us but to entice our hearts for the grace of God which presses us but does not oppress us." Pope Francis reminds us of the relevance of this doctor of Gospel gentleness in his apostolic letter at the 400th anniversary of his death on 28th December last year. Furthermore, we can always invoke this great saint who inspired our Founder so that, in our religious communities and in this residence, we let a family ambience grow where everyone is surrounded by "respectful cordiality and cordial respect" as St Michael Garicoïts recommends. The journey of our brother encourages us to be kind and gentle towards each other.

*(From the homily of Fr. Laurent Bacho scj
for the funeral of Fr. Monnot)*



from Him, his Lord, in the solitude of a cold night in March 1973.

The Gospel we have just heard speaks of Jesus at home in Capernaum, crushed by the crowd blocking any way

the time of Jesus, celibacy for the Kingdom was seen as something "out of place" (cf. Mt. 19,12ff). In addition, our mission permanently places us in dialogue with cultures that are atypical, challenging, and they force us to sincerely ask ourselves if we are in the midst of people a sign of God's love.

Just as poverty becomes a "sign of the Kingdom" in a *materialistic world* due to: "not having, not possessing, being with the poor, etc."; Thus, celibacy for the Kingdom, lived in chastity, in a *hedonistic world* needs to become visible and credible through a *process of personal maturation* for which we are responsible, in tune with the gift received.

We religious are not called to *be worldly*, to be simply *bachelors, little princes, or prima donnas* ... The personal alliance with the Lord -which we believe changed our lives- has given us a *mood different from that of sterility*. Because Jesus Christ called us and *loved us first, and destined us to bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God*. That is our pastoral fruitfulness, lived in the *style of Jesus*, which always remains.

Thus, he who, like Jesus, lets the other simply "be" is chaste; he does not own him, he does not manipulate him for his own ends; his respectful attitude shows that he recognises in each brother or sister a *separate identity*. He lives his affective relationships respecting distance and otherness.

The one who is not chaste does not seek that *rapport*, but instead *fusion*, or *confusion*. Hence, chastity is important for everyone, not only for the consecrated, because it invites us to develop the ability to live our affective relationships, *maturing in Christ*, and respecting everyone in their sexual identity, gender or state of life.

In the contemporary cultural context, there is a real difficulty in the practice of chastity, taking into account the easy access to forms of "virtual intimacy" or "pseudo intimacy", and this situation can pose serious difficulties for the stability of the bonds and choices in the affective area, even in those who have chosen celibacy for the Kingdom. Remember: we are not born chaste, but we become chaste...

Hence, we need to return permanently to the gospel of the *little ones*. The Betharramite, "*small, enduring, constant, and always happy*" will always be in need of God's love and he must know how to receive with gratitude what is given to him, in this field of chastity. Otherwise

he may fall into the other extreme..., wanting to solve for himself what is frustrating or difficult for him.

Presumption (excessive confidence in one's own qualities) and *recklessness* (indiscreet, daring beyond risks) are two attitudes which unfortunately do not lead to, or aspire to chastity. Both work against the virtue of hope, which is why it is said that we will always need a *lucid and serene humility* in the face of the challenges and temptations that arise.

The vow we made one day was pronounced with courage, but life leaves us hurt and, therefore, the moment in which we present ourselves to the Lord at the end of the road may not be splendid. Rather, it is probable that many of us arrive "*empty-handed of merit*" (Saint Therese of the Child Jesus). Even so, I hope that living this vow will allow each Betharramite to be freer and that -as Saint Michael wished- "*with our hearts dilated with a holy joy, we will always run and fly mysteriously to the service of God*" (cf. DS §137), present in the life of each brother and each sister entrusted to us.

SOME QUESTIONS:

- Has this reflection connected with your own experience? Share in the community what you want about your experiences of this vow. Do it as one who listens, experiences and discerns.
- What new place have you given to your family, friends and personal times, after you decided to follow Christ in religious life and practice chastity for the Kingdom?

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

•\• Betharram in heaven •/\•

Father Pierre MONNOT scj

Amiens, 30 October 1932 – Betharram, 22 January 2023 (France)

Fr Monnot's birth at Amiens did not destine him for Betharram. It was the Second World War, with the bombing of Amiens by the German army in May 1940, that made his parents leave, abandoning a lorry transport business in favour of agriculture in the Landes region (South West France), in Villeneuve de Marsan. The role of his father in this business might explain the curiosity of Pierre for anything to do with engines, science and technology !

He did the whole of his secondary education here at the apostolate from 1942 to 1950 before his novitiate in Pau, in the community of the Child Jesus, where he made his first religious profession on 8th September 1951. Then the scholasticate at Bel Sito, interrupted by military service with priestly ordination at the chapel of the Great Seminary of Bordeaux on 14th March 1959, with two other Betharramite brothers, Emile Garat and Jean Etchebarne.

Six months later, he was the youngest of the Betharramite trio, founder of the standard St Michael course at Ferkessédougou in Côte d'Ivoire. There, he would deploy all the energy of his youth for six years as teacher/educator, but also providing several external pastoral services. Then Betharram took charge of the Small St John's Seminary at Katiola and he stayed there for 8 years. I took my first steps as a young professed brother in community with him and I



admired his missionary zeal which was a blessing for me; teaching in the mornings in the seminary, he was chaplain in the afternoons in a public high school, going there joyfully despite the hot sun. Then he was chosen to enable Betharram to diversify his presence as vicar in a parish in the bush at Niakarramandougou, but he only stayed there a year.

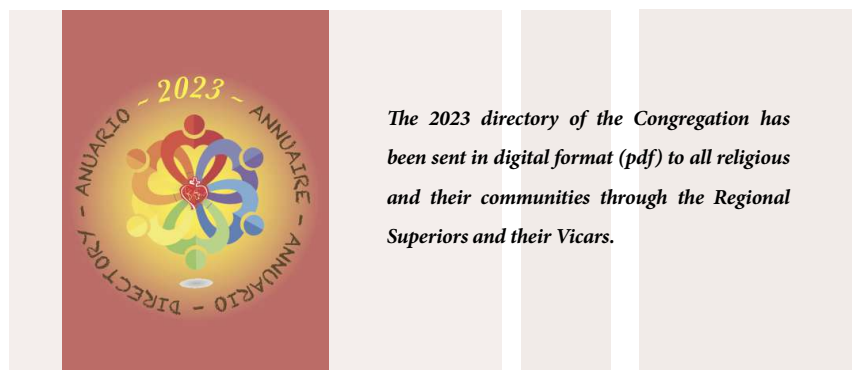
For forty years, he would live a way of the cross in a permanent questioning, wondering how to carry out the will of God which seemed baffling to him, between a faithfulness to commitments made at Betharram and family concerns which gnawed at him. I imagine that he must have often referred to today's Gospel passage, where Jesus himself makes a clear choice, accepting a family implosion for family enlargement and an integration of all those who do the will of God, gathered no longer by blood but by the call of God and the desire to do his will !

Even in the spiritual and human

•\• Notices from the general council •/\•

■ The *Commission of preparation for the General Chapter* (members of the Council of the Congregation) will be gathering in the coming days – from February 20 to 25 – in Rome, at the Generalate House.

On this occasion, *the General Council will meet also in plenary session.*



In the Peace of the Lord

India | 16 January 2023 - **Mr. G. Maria Joseph**, father of Fr. Arul Gnana Prakash scj, Regional Vicar in India, passed away at the age of 74 after a long illness. We pray for his eternal rest and we feel close to Fr. Arul and his family.



•\• A message from the bishop of Rome •/\•



Homily • Solemnity of the conversion of Saint Paul

Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Wednesday 25 January 2023

[...]

The theme of this Week of Prayer was chosen by a group of Christians from Minnesota, conscious of the injustices perpetrated in the past against native peoples and in our own day against African-Americans. Before the various forms of contempt and racism, before indifference, lack of understanding and sacrilegious violence, the word of God admonishes us: “*learn to do good, seek justice*” (Is 1:17). It is not enough to denounce, we need also to renounce evil, to pass from evil to good. In other words, admonishment is meant to change us.

2. Change. After diagnosing our wrongs, the Lord asks us to remedy them and, through the prophet, tells us: “*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; cease to do evil*” (v. 16). Yet knowing that we are overwhelmed and, as it were, paralyzed by our many sins, he promises that he himself will wash away our sins. “*Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like*

crimson, they shall become like wool” (v. 18). Dear friends, due to our failure to understand God and the violence that lurks within us, we are incapable of setting ourselves free. Without God, without his grace, we are not healed of our sin. God’s grace is the source of our change. We see this in the life of the Apostle Paul, whom we commemorate today. By ourselves, we cannot succeed, but with God, all is possible. By ourselves, we do not succeed, but together, it is possible. For the Lord asks his disciples to be converted together. Conversion – a word that is repeated often but not always easily understood – is demanded of the people; it is communitarian and ecclesial in nature. Consequently, we also believe that our ecumenical conversion grows to the extent that we recognize our need for God’s grace, our need for his mercy. In acknowledging that we are dependent on God for everything, we will truly, with his aid, feel and “*be one*” (Jn 17:21). This is important, brothers and sisters.

What a beautiful thing it is to

be open, together, in the grace of the Spirit, to this change of perspective. To rediscover that *"all the faithful throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, so that - as Saint John Chrysostom wrote - 'those who dwell in Rome knows those in India to be part of the same body'"* (Lumen Gentium, 13; In Io. Hom., 65,1). On this journey of fellowship, I am grateful that so many Christians, of various communities and traditions, are accompanying with participation and interest the synodal journey of the Catholic Church, which I trust will become increasingly ecumenical. Let us not forget that journeying together and acknowledging that we are in communion with one another in the Holy Spirit entails a change, the growth that can only take place, as Benedict XVI wrote, *"on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend"* (Deus Caritas Est, 18).

May the Apostle Paul help us to change, to be converted; may he obtain for us something of his own indomitable courage. Since in the course of our journey, it is easy to work for our own group rather than for the kingdom of God, to grow impatient, to give up on the hope of

that day when *"all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one Church, which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning"* (Unitatis Redintegratio, 4). Precisely in view of that day, we place our trust in Jesus, our Pasch and our peace: while we pray and worship him, he is ever at work. And we are comforted by the words of Saint Paul, which we can feel addressed to each one of us: *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Cor 12:9).

Dear friends, in a fraternal spirit I wanted to share these thoughts that the word of God has awakened in me, so that, admonished by God, by his grace we can change and grow through praying, serving, engaging in dialogue and working together towards the full unity that Christ desires. ■

design a programme of "things for young people". In Pistoia, the community has done the reverse: we started with the idea of living "things" together and then the project that ensued actually came from the young people themselves. Going out to meet others, stepping outside of one's comfort zone in terms of stereotypes or the "one-size-fits-all" prefab project, is that not a gift

from the Spirit? The young people have been a sign for the religious, in their desire to grow and to share the "Here I Am" of Jesus, taken up by St Michael. What riches are to be found in young people! If we allow ourselves to be challenged by their questions and their dreams, we can turn to the future with renewed hope. ■





and make it real, in their everyday lives.

And yet this journey does not end with the little group around the community. Very quickly, the young people of Pistoia wanted to meet others connected with Betharram, in Italy and further afield. Before the pandemic put a stop to it, the *BetharrAmici* went out beyond the parishes entrusted to Betharram: Langhirano (near Parma) and Lissone (a suburb of Milan); with the latter, in particular, the relationship deepened to the point where they worked together on joint proposals for submission to the Regional Chapter in 2022.

Consistent with this open-mindedness, the *BetharrAmici* have said they would like to repeat the experiences they enjoyed,

pre-Covid 19, at summer camp with young people from France and Ivory Coast (the walk from Betharram to Ibarre; the workshop camp at Katiola and the Marian pilgrimage planned in Tuscany). Indeed, there is nothing quite like these high points for widening one's horizons and getting one's heart beating! Some of the *BetharrAmici* group are also members of the Pistoia diocesan youth ministry team and play an active part in all the initiatives undertaken in this regard. Lastly, it is not without significance that the postulant currently making his journey with the Betharramite community should have come from their very ranks.

Too often, pastoral youth ministry is confined to being a place where you reflect then



From the missionary pioneers to the first sons of St. Michael Garicoïts in Thailand

Roberto Cornara

A little more than 70 years have lapsed since that afternoon of December 18th 1951 when Fathers Saint-Guily, Pédebideau, Laulom, Bignolles and Séguinotte arrived in Chiang Mai to found the Betharramite mission in the North of Thailand. Expelled from Tali in China, the Betharramite missionaries had asked and obtained from Mgr. Chorin, the Apostolic Vicar in Bangkok, the permission to establish themselves in his Vicariate to go on evangelizing the peoples of South East Asia.

After those five first pioneers, other missionaries soon arrived in Thailand : some « elders » from China, some young ones who had not known either Tali or Yunnan, but were urged by the same desire to bring the Gospel « to the confines of the world ». Let us not forget their names : Br. Dimas and Fathers Lanusse, Sablayrolles, Londaïtzbèhère,

Fognini, Saubatte, Lhouerrou, Bonnat, Oxibar, Carraro, Trezzi, Pucheu, Bataillès, Salla, Trusgnach, Grassi and Luzzi, followed later by Fathers Rodriguez, Perlini, Urbani, Caset, Donini, Pensa, Salacrist and O'Malley. Mgr. Lucien Lacoste, the Bishop of Tali, was at the head of this big missionary group. The Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok entrusted him with directing the evangelization of North Thailand under his direct dependence and authority.

The evangelizing work was soon bearing its fruit, mainly among the ethnic groups of the mountains, particularly the Kariens and the Akhas. In 1954, Mgr. Chorin committed the Chiang Mai parish of the Sacred Heart to the Betharramites. Missionary centers were founded in Chomthong, Maepon, Maerim-Sobrim, Chiang Dao, Maesarieng, Huay Bong, Muang Ngam, Viang Pa Pao,

Maethoklo... then others in the following years.

Seeing that the missionary work was growing, the Holy See decided that it was time to divide the immense Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok. On November 17th 1959, with the *Caelorum regnum constitution*, Rome established the Chiang Mai Prefecture Apostolic, with jurisdiction on eight provinces of North Thailand. Mgr. Lacoste, while still bearing the title of Bishop of Tali, was named Apostolic Administrator of the new ecclesiastical jurisdiction, *quam Sodalibus Societatis Presbyterorum Sanctissimi Cordis Jesu de Betharram bernandam concredimus* (= entrusted to the members of the Society of the priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram).

Six years later, on December 18th 1965, the Prefecture Apostolic became a diocese (constitution *Qui in fastigio*), and Mgr. Lacoste remained Apostolic Administrator. He kept his office until he resigned in 1975, having reached the age limit.

The work of the Betharramite Fathers, helped by male and female religious from other congregations and missionary institutes, augmented the number of Catholics in the diocese. According to the pontifical directories, the diocese, in 1970, had a little more than 5000 faithful, a number which had doubled 10 years later, to

reach around 20 000 in 1990. We must not either forget the work accomplished by the missionaries to "invent" a Karien writing and to translate the Bible into the local languages.

In the 80's, as the religious were ageing and as the new Betharramite generation had less missionary impetus, the Fathers of Chiang Mai and the whole Congregation reflected on the meaning of their presence in Thailand. These reflections were concluded by deciding, in 1986, to open a seminary in Sampran, in the outskirts of Bangkok, to train young Thai men to St. Michael's spirit and charism. Now, it belongs to these young religious, rooted in a church both local and missionary, to continue the work accomplished during decades by the Fathers with sacrifice, but always following the Founder's teaching: *Here I am, Lord, to do your will.* ■

community, for its part, allowed itself to be guided by a spirit of humility and unpretentiousness and very soon became identified with the centuries-old traditions inherited from the Franciscans; hence the affection and devotion of the parishioners which the community now enjoys. At present there are five Betharramite religious in Pistoia: Fr Natale Re (Superior and Bursar), Brother Severino Urbani, Fr Pietro Villa, Fr Simone Panzeri and Fr Serge Appaouh, recently arrived from Ivory Coast.

Each of them performs his ministry unassumingly, living in true closeness to the people who come to the church each day, sure of finding an attentive ear.

In addition to their pastoral ministry, the Fathers also have diocesan responsibilities in different areas: health, youth ministry and vocations, charitable work, spiritual guidance, etc. For the past couple of years, Gabriele Vassallo, a 40-year old postulant, is also living in the community; he is currently on his journey of discernment and initial formation in our religious family.

When the community left the parish of Montemurlo, it brought in its wake a group of young people connected to Betharram, going by

the name of the "*BetharrAmici*" (Friends of Betharram). In 2017 they officially requested the General Chapter for support and guidance in their desire to learn more about St Michael Garicoits and the Congregation, and this activity is now taking place in Pistoia.

We see that in responding to appeals from the diocese, that caring for God's people and indeed any person seeking guidance and the truth, our community is following in the founder's footsteps.

From the outset, it has been the community's priority to help all who are searching, starting with young people who look to test their vocation within the Congregation. This mission is carried out by all religious on the ground, but some however are more directly involved with this. This duty was allocated to them when the young people themselves asked that the links created in Montemurlo remain intact. Indeed, the initiative of the *BetharrAmici* arose out of their desire to make their lives a place of encounter with the Lord, in little everyday things. "Here I am" is the keystone of their commitment and continues to engage them; it's the same "Here I am" which they reappraise at their monthly meetings, to discern God's will



...the community of Pistoia
(Italy)

Fr. Simone Panzeri scj

Father Simone Panzeri, currently the Diocesan Official for Youth Ministry and the parish priest for the ancient parish of San Francesco, gives us an idea of what Betharramite ministry really consists of in Pistoia (Tuscan Region, in the central Italy).

In the foothills of the Apennines, not far from Florence, lies the city of Pistoia, surrounded by tree- and plant nurseries which are in the business of exporting live plants around the world. Pistoia's cathedral houses a precious relic of Saint James of Compostela, known here as "Santo Jacopo".

Seven years ago, at the request of the Bishop, a Community of Betharramites set up in the heart of this tranquil Tuscan town.

Following their ministry in the mountains and 35 years spent in Montemurlo, the sons of St Michael were transported to San

Francesco: an urban parish with the largest, most monumental church in the whole Diocese, occupying an area of one hectare (or roughly 2.2 acres) which gives onto one of Pistoia's main town squares.

The beginnings were not easy. The Betharramites had taken over from the Order of Friars Minor Conventual (Franciscans), who had had to vacate their monastery and leave the parish where they had been ministering since 1232, because of a lack of vocations. The first Mass celebrated by the new arrivals, in the presence of Mgr Tardelli and a handful of faithful, revealed a certain bitterness at the departure of the monks. However, as the years went by, thanks to a gradual process of getting to know one another, the Lord graciously saw to it that the Brothers and Fathers of Betharram grew in the esteem of the local Christian community. The religious



St. Miriam Regional Chapter
Chiang Mai 23-28 January 2023

Fr. Austin Hughes scj

We met at Ban Betharram Chiang Mai, a natural choice for our third face-to-face Chapter. The other two had been in Olton (2010) and Bangalore (2016). For the first time in a regional gathering most of the 18 delegates knew each other quite well. Fr. Enrico our Regional Superior who sensitively organised the whole event had in fact trained several key participants. Different batches of students had studied together, and now all the young priests and religious know each other from a common novitiate or study programme, or from meeting in Betharram. Gratitude was expressed to the formators present, and those of the past (like Frs Biju Alappat and Biju Anthony) who had made this possible.

We took on board the opening spiritual input of the chapter given by Paul Pollock SJ who borrowed from an address of Pope Francis last

year to theologians and formators. He spoke of four ways of being close: close to God, close to our Superiors, close to one another, and close to the people we serve. Many of our inputs took this theme on board, and a particular pearl of wisdom of Pope Francis connected with us all: "If you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far then go together". Travelling together was very much a focus of our sharing.

Fr. Enrico gave an overall report on the region, ably supported by the regional vicars and their bursars. The picture of mission in the two young vicariates (India and Thailand) was one of gradual growth and expansion with new missions, new schools (especially in India) and many of the joys that young religious experience in working in the vineyard of the Lord. Both the young vicariates



Mutual support between vicariates (exchange of personnel and exchange of finance) has been a blessing for the Saint Miriam region. The India vicariate is grateful for outside

supported the older brother vicariate (England) with generous gifts and loans of personnel, bringing energy and enthusiasm to their ministry. This contrast is highlighted when the average age of each vicariate is taken into account England 65 Thailand 47 India 42.

Though each vicariate has its own tensions (some ethnic, some generational, some personality), religious within each Vicariate do try to support each other in mission, and support individual religious when they fall into difficulties. Despite differences we insist that we are first and foremost the family of Betharram not Karen or Kannadigas or English. We belong to the family of Saint Michael, and the Saint Miriam region has helped develop that sense of identity.

financial support while the England vicariate is grateful for the support of religious from both Thailand and India. In particular England enjoys the presence of three dedicated Indian superiors. English is the common language of the region, though this is easier for the Indians than for the Thais. Volunteer lay teachers from England have tried to help with this in Thailand.

We spoke about our Vietnam mission, as both India and Thailand have lent support to the emerging Vietnam community with training (in Shobhana Shaakha & Sampran) and formation personnel in HCM, while the England vicariate has given great financial support to the Vietnam community. Would Vietnam one day be a part of our region? They are located in an Asian milieu and have many

I am Brother John Weerapong Youhae SCJ. I belong to The Holy Family parish, Hoebong of the Diocese of Chiang Mai. I have five members in my family – father, mother, brother and sister. I am the eldest son in my family. I came to know about the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram through Fr. John Chokdee Damronganura SCJ. I joined in our religious family of Betharram in 2007.

After completing my schooling in 2010, I had two years of experience at our congregation's parish. I completed my philosophical studies at Saengtham College, Thailand in 2017. After that, I went to India for the Regional novitiate. Returning from India upon receiving my first profession, I resumed my theological studies at Saentham college, and completed it in 2022. I received my final vows on 27 January 2023.

Thanks to the grace of God, and



the guidance of my formators and mission superiors both in formation houses and parishes who formed me in a different dimension of religious life, I learned more and more about the charism and spirituality of our congregation. The years of religious life helped me to inculcate the spirit of St. Michael and the rich missionary tradition of our congregation. The personal and community prayer life help me to become rooted in Jesus Christ.

I am also aware that I need to deepen my spiritual journey towards God through spiritual direction, and accompaniment with my formators, superiors and members of the community wherever I live. Trusting in the providence of God and the maternal care of our Mother of Betharram, I keep myself honest and open in my sharing with one another to be faithful in the family of Betharram.

I thank the Lord for the manifold experiences He has been showering upon me with His steadfast love through the ups and downs of my life to grow stronger in my vocation and mission. Always ahead. ■





mother she replied 'if God wishes let it be' she was an encouraging and a supportive person in my life. Later when I joined a boarding school there a Diocesan Priest Fr. Martin Antony (who is no more) he inspired me and encouraged me to be a religious priest.

In the year 2013 I joined the Congregation of Betharram, this year was just a year of introduction for me, during my Aspirancy Fathers explained the life of St Michael Garicoits, it was very new for me, but the life of St. Michael was very much interesting for me. I had a feeling in me that my life was also just similar to St. Michael's family.

St Michael's life, his way of spirituality and the mission of our fathers inspired me to be a Betharramite, keeping this as a foundation I journeyed in different stages of formation. During these many years I have learnt to be humble and be available to all the needs of

the congregation and the people of God.

I personally encounter the Lord in the Holy Eucharist, through reading the Word of God, through reading and practicing the Sacred Heart Spirituality of St Michael and meeting the people in my day-to-day life. Being a Betharramite I wish to do the will of God with full of love and open heart, the words of St. Michael "Give me a heart that truly loves" echoes in me always.

Today when I look into those beginning days, the spirit of my desire is still alive in me. I made my Final Vows on 17th January 2023; I gave myself entirely to God and for His mission. I wish and pray that our Father St. Michael Garicoits and the Betharramites in Heaven accompany me in every step that I take. May I remain humble and obedient to His will.

Thank You. ■

cultural traits in common with Thailand. The only qualification they lack is that they do not drive on the left.

The sense of belonging to Betharram has a different history in each country. England vicariate was founded from France in 1909, by exiled French priests working in mission for many years before seeking Betharramite vocations. So roots are deep, especially as in the 1920s and 30s young English candidates were sent to France and Palestine for formation along with candidates from other countries. Back then everybody got to know one other no matter what their origin.

In Thailand Betharram evangelised the Northern Villages, so the roots go back many years. A young Thai candidate will often say that a Betharramite missionary baptised him, and another baptised his parents. This also bears fruit in the way in which Betharram alumni in Thailand are very attached to our Congregation, and support our

mission.

In India though the church is ancient, Betharramite roots are not so old. Here Formation preceded mission, as Betharram did not evangelise India, so the 'family connection' is different from Thailand. Hence why effort was put into nurturing the relation with England since 2001, when the India delegation was joined to England.

In each vicariate every religious and community supports a common fund, (the system varying in each place) But this support is important for the sense of belonging. For example the communities in the Indian Vicariate give a significant amount of money to our Betharram mission in Assam. While in the Thai vicariate all the Diocesan salaries are given direct to vicariate funds for formation.



We recalled Fr. Graziano's famous dictum of a few years ago: 'When we religious talk about the Holy Trinity, everybody smiles in agreement, but when we talk about what touches my pocket, then there is uproar!' Happily at this Chapter the disagreements were very good natured and without uproar! But finance is an issue in all vicariates. In both Thailand and India, everyday community living expenses are covered by priestly salaries and lay donations. Formation finance is covered by both internal effort and external help. But the cost of supporting Regional Expenses or General Council expenses, or air fares for Betharram gatherings abroad is beyond the normal reach of the younger vicariates, though both make significant sacrifices. The extra contributions made by the England vicariate to formation since 1997 have only been possible

because of the investment fund created by the sale of land at the old Sacred Heart College at Droitwich. Registration of land in the name of Betharram is an issue in both India and Thailand, and much progress has been made since the last Chapter.

Hopes for the future were shared initially in small intimate groups at the chapter and then later with the whole assembly. These are just a few:

- A plea was made for the recruitment of religious brothers in the younger vicariates. Brothers were an important part of the Congregation in the time of St. Michael, so why not now? And if there are cultural resistances to Brotherhood, how can we overcome them? In England Brothers have saved community life.
- How can we nurture our own

spirituality and prayer life? Does a regular prayer life only exist in the house of formation? Might a wise spiritual father appointed for each vicariate be a help to us?

- How can we form projects in each vicariate that have a clear Betharramite identity? We work very hard for Dioceses everywhere, as the Congregation did in St. Michael's day, but how can we show more clearly our Betharramite charism? It has implications for vocational promotion. This has a financial aspect too. In some places we labour for Diocesan projects but the Diocese reaps the financial reward!

- The formators all work very hard but need to feel supported at all times. The attitudes and actions of older religious are significant here, especially when they visit houses of formation and young students look to them as role models.

This Chapter tried to follow a synodal path, as Pope Francis asked the whole church to do last year. So we did not attempt to come up with surprising or innovative radical proposals to change the world. Instead we listened to one another, confident that the Holy Spirit was at work in our sharing and patient listening. We left the rest in the hands of the Lord. ■

..... New professed with perpetual vows in the Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region



Stephen R SCJ, whole heartedly thank you all for your prayers, love and support towards me.

I come from a small family in the

Dear, Respected Fathers, Brothers and Lay Betharramites, I Br.

city of Bangalore, Karnataka. At home I have my mother two elder sisters, my brother-in-law, my nieces and nephew.

I desired to become a priest when I was in class 7th, it was in that same year I received Jesus first time into my heart. There after I joined altar service group to serve in the altar, I never missed the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist. When I shared my desire to my

