

January Supplement

## *The correction of the Constitutions and the so longed vow of Poverty*



| Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Soon available in pdf on [www.betharram.net](http://www.betharram.net)

**W**e will not obtain definitive approval if we do not embrace by our vows this common life of poverty.

Oh! no doubt this God so good, who grants us the grace to know his will, and this will, will also enable us to respond to it; but since our co-operation is required, let us pray to obtain that wonderful unity of views and sentiments which are the strength and happiness of congregations.

*Fr. Auguste Etchecopar, 18 November 1875, letter to Fr. Magendie*



Societas S<sup>mi</sup> Cordis Jesu  
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# NEF

# Betharram

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### A word from the superior general

## The slippery pathway of 'non-poverty'

*"How I would like a poor Church for the poor!"  
(Pope Francis - Discourse. March 16, 2013)*

Dear Betharramites,

We religious make public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for life. It is a fact that marks us, and a testimony that we are called to live before the People of God. We commit ourselves to *do and not to do certain things* that, certainly, demand fidelity, though the practicalities are always debated because of the complexity of human situations. Saint Paul recognised this struggle, he did not deny it. He tried to be faithful through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 7.14-8, 8).

We Betharramites want to practice **evangelical poverty** to witness that we have found the precious pearl of the Kingdom. In the first Christian community "no one considered their own, what belonged to him, but everything was in common between them" (Acts 4.32).

In order for it to be visible that “*Jesus Christ is our only treasure*” and not a mere proclamation of intentions, we freely and voluntarily subject ourselves to *specific practices*, which people sometimes ignore, *but which are important* to us, since they vitally manifest and reproduce that we have internalized the gospel of Jesus and that we have renounced being hypocrites like the Pharisees, who were friends of money; or like the Sadducees, mere enjoyers of well-being, who did not believe in the resurrection, perhaps because they enjoyed the privileges of belonging to a wealthy minority.

Sometimes, even from initial formation, it is difficult to internalise some principles that should characterise our religious being.

1. Accepting dependency (like a common worker, like a son, like a poor person).
2. Rendering accounts regularly (...and with transparency).
3. Not possessing for ourselves but rather sharing with the community (rejecting all spirit of possession).
4. Living a simple life (simple like that of the people in my neighbourhood, who must save what they can and manage what they have to live on).

In fact, these principles of the Betharramite school are learned over the years, just as the poor must learn in practice to accept “sister poverty”.

A religious brother once said to me: Do you know what the vow of poverty is for me...?: “*It is the art of knowing how to ask.*” We laughed together, because his humorous statement was not malicious. He had always been a missionary who had chosen to live simply, although he could have had a good chance of living comfortably without anyone knowing...

Another venerable father, with white hair, told me during the novitiate: “*Gustavo, in the congregation, those who want to be poor are poor.*” That father, who never wasted a crust of bread, and who was an excellent priest, was an example of contagious simplicity.

It is a fact that poverty well lived also requires good humour and explicit witness. Sister Poverty urges and nudges, and ends up encouraging us to be “poor” even if we have been slow to accept her. It is both a gift and a task.

- On November 15, 2022, the Holy See granted the **indult of departure from the Congregation to Fr. Paul Mary Subancha Yindeengarm**, who has been incardinated in the diocese of Chiang Rai (Thailand).

#### Meeting of the General Council on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

- The Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the **closure of the community “Colegio Apostólico San José” and the community of Lambaré** (Asunción, Vicariate of Paraguay) and the **erection of the community of “Lambaré-Colegio Apostólico San José”, from February 1st, 2023** (RL. § 206/b-f);
- and approved the **appointment of Fr. Raul Villalba as Superior of the community “Lambaré-Colegio Apostólico San José” for a 1<sup>st</sup> mandate, from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023** (RL. § 206/a).

#### Meeting of the General Council on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

- The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, **admitted Br. John Baptist N’GUYEN VAN Thang, of our residence in Vietnam, to the renewal of vows for two years** (RL. § 161 et 245/a).
- The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, **admitted Br. Francis-Xavier TRAN VAN Hong, of our residence in Vietnam, to receive the minister of lectorate** (RL. § 150 and 245/a).
- The Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the **appointment of Br. Sixto Benitez as Superior of the Community “Colegio San José” in Asunción (Vicariate of Paraguay), for a 1<sup>st</sup> mandate, from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023** (RL. § 206/a).
- The Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the **appointment of Br. Victor Torales as Superior of the Community of Puente Remanso (Vicariate of Paraguay), for a 1<sup>st</sup> mandate, from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023** (RL. § 206/a).

## HUAYBONG Parish

The Huaybong parish is located at Chaiprakan, Chiangmai. This parish was founded by Late Bishop Lucien Lacoste the first Bishop of Chiangmai Diocese and Betharram missionaries as co-founder of Huaybong parish. Some of the Betharram Fathers who worked at Huaybong parish are Fr. Lanusse, Fr. Pédebideau, Fr. Salla and Fr. Ugo Donini.

At present, Fr. John Chokdee Damrong Anurak is the parish priest assisted by two Maepon sisters.

There are 120 families who have originally migrated from Mae Sarian and Mae Hongson. There are 3 substations namely; Christ the King at Ban Huaybong with 49 families, St. Scholastica Church at Ban Pang Bor with 50 families and the Assumption Church at Ban- On with 11 families.

The parish Priest resides at Ban Huaybong and celebrates Eucharist daily at 19.00pm and on Sunday at 09.00am for the parishners. On every Saturday we have catechism classes for the children, Christian prayer, Classes on Sacraments and teaching the young



to read and write their own tribal language. We also visit families and offer Holy Communion to the sick and the elderly.

At the substation Churches, we mainly focus on the celebration of the Eucharist and visit the families twice in a month. ■

*People in the villages were used to the European fathers as missionaries who had looked after them for all these years. So, initially they had a little apprehension to have their own people as priests to take care of them which were a challenging experience. But it did not take longer time to win their confidence and to place their trust in us.*

*The people in the villages also began to change their mindset that missionaries are not only the Europeans but all those who are set apart for the works of God are missionaries. We experience a lot of acceptance and hospitality from them. They believe that they can approach us as men of God who are there to reach out to them whenever they call on us for any spiritual help and advice.*

Unfortunately, we live in a materialistic and consumerist world, which places permanent obstacles to the evangelical path, and makes it tortuous, because it makes us see as "normal" what is not acceptable for a religious. Today more than ever it is necessary to recover our religious identity as Betharramites capable of serving the poorest with the joy of living, stripped of everything.

Saint Michael Garicoits once said: *"From birth, the divine Child traces the path for us: he launches himself, he runs, he always goes ahead, in poverty and scarcity. We are proud to follow him. May the paths traced by God not be for us an unknown and strange path, but a real path, where we advance, proud of our glory, happy for our certainty..."* (DS § 96)

It puzzles me a lot today to see some religious who seem not to love *dispossession in spirit and heart*. We all have our attachments, it's true, but please let's not get bogged down by material things, the good life, or gentrification.

Among the People of God, we, as shepherds, have been called to closely contemplate the poverty that Jesus incarnates to show us the love that lives in the bosom of the Trinity. That Child, together with Mary and Joseph, has become the model of our life to give and share. Jesus *"emptied himself assuming the condition of a servant"* (Phil 2.7).

*"The incarnate Word is a humbled and submissive God"* (SMG).

*We pledged to be poor at heart, trusting in Providence, detached from all desire to possess.* This interior freedom leads us to welcome everyone, especially the poorest, *"with the same heart as Christ"* (PC 13).

If we say that the poor challenge and evangelise us (often said from the pulpit) then our life should be more subject to the law of work, to earn a living as a family and not so much to seek personal comfort, recognition or extraordinary help... Sharing in the community should provide us with everything we need to live on.

The sharing of goods is a sign for the whole Church and for the world. If we do otherwise, we cultivate an *idolatry* capable of losing the trust of the faithful and even causing scandal. A person from our local town once told me: *'Father, if you (religious) fall in love we can forgive you; the obedience you profess (which we struggle to understand) can be*

*a source of admiration or regret; but when we see a religious who is a "friend of money"... I assure you that this alienates people from the Church'.*

This also questions how quickly we can forget our modest origins (most of us come from humble families like St Michael Garicoits). Professing that we are Betharramites should help us not to deny our roots under the pretext of a supposed clerical or religious privilege.

If the Betharramite Family bears witness to true love and poverty, then this *sign* will make us an open and supportive family to make the Kingdom of God more present. The future of our religious family depends to a great extent on this fidelity.

Pope Francis dreams of a *poor Church, for the poor*.

So Betharramites who are walking together towards the 2023 General Chapter, do we want to join that dream? The place to begin is by being honest with ourselves, before the Word of God and our Constitutions, to make ourselves even more credible, so that *the slippery path of 'non-poverty'* does not become our path.

#### QUESTIONS TO HELP REFLECTION IN COMMUNITY:

- What witness do we give today in our way of living the vow of poverty?
- Is there something in this article that has challenged us to improve our way of living poverty?
- What can we share about community poverty?

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**  
Superior General

studies especially in skill training and development according to their aptitude and interest.

#### MUANGNAM Parish

Muangam parish consists of 3 villages. Ban Muangam is closer to Chiangrai and it is about 200 km away from Chiangmai.

Muangam was part of the Huaybong parish earlier until 2014. But owing to the number of catholic families and for reaching out to the people easily, a need was felt to create Muangam Parish where most of the people are belonging to the Karen tribe. The lay people felt the warmth of the Betharram Pioneering missionaries especially Fr. Pier Zala and Fr. Ugo Donini who gave themselves in total commitment and service to the people.

After separating Muangam from Huaybong Parish in 2014, the Congregation appointed Thai Betharram priests to continue the mission of serving the people both in Huaybong and Muangam.

Muangam villagers are originally from Mae Sariang and Mae Hongson and most of them are belonging to Karen tribe. There are 180 families with two substations namely, St. Peter and St.

Paul Church at Ban Pong Glangnam and Our Lady of protection Church at Huayngoo.

The Parish Priest resides at Muangam village at the Church of Immaculate Conception Parish. At the Parish we have Catechism classes for children and youth, Legion of Mary and youth group. We have daily mass at 19.00 pm. and Sunday mass at 09.00am.

At the substation churches we mainly focus on the liturgy of the Eucharist and visiting the sick people in the families.

On 19th May 2022, Ban Muangam celebrated 60 years of the presence of Betharram Priests at the village. Rev. Bishop Francis Xavier Vira Apornratana, Bishop of Chiangmai was the main celebrant at the Eucharistic celebration and he blessed and appreciated the Betharram fathers for their untiring zeal in spreading the Gospel and helping the faithful to deepen their faith in Christ.







The Epiphany Catholic Church Fang mission consists of 21 villages with 3500 Catholics belonging to mainly Akha, Lahu, Thai Yai and some Karen tribes. Every Saturday and Sunday, and often other days too, the Priests go to different villages to offer Mass and visit the sick and elderly in their families. By the end of the month, we make sure that all the villages had the celebration of the Eucharist in their churches and where possible in their own tribal languages. Once a month, we also visit the families around Fang city, to distribute Holy Communion to the old and the sick.

There's also a trained Catechetical team including a Presentation sister, who goes to different villages in the evening from Monday to Thursday to teach Catechism to the school going children. They prepare the children for different Sacraments, deepen their knowledge of Christ and help them to grow in faith. Since the Presentation sister is a Nurse by profession, she attends to the health needs of the people in the villages too.

We also have a mission Centre here, with 71 children including both boys and girls who are in the age group of 7 -17 years. These children are from different villages belonging to different tribes mainly of Akha, Lahu, Thai Yai and Karen who have no access to school and some others are from broken families. The Priests, two Presentation sisters, 5 Wardens, a Betharram brother and 4 Kitchen staff play an important role in moulding their personality as we care for their academic, social, cultural and spiritual Formation. We have Eucharistic Celebration daily for children and staff and on first Fridays of every month we have adoration and confession for them. On weekends since no school, children are taught catechism, their own tribal language and also train them in different skills like learning of guitar, art, keyboard, sports activities etc. for an all-around development of the children. They are helped to complete their secondary education. After the completion of their secondary education, we help them to find places for their further

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



### Homily • Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

St Peter's Basilica, Friday, 6 January 2023

Like a rising star (cf. Num 24:17), Jesus comes to enlighten all peoples and to brighten the nights of humanity. Today, with the Magi, let us lift our eyes to heaven and ask: "Where is the child who has been born?" (Mt 2:2). Where can we find and encounter our Lord?

From the experience of the Magi, we learn that the first "place" where he loves to be sought is in restless questioning. The exciting adventure of these Wise Men from the East teaches us that faith is not born of our own merits, thoughts and theories. Rather, it is God's gift. (...) For the Magi, that was the beginning: the restlessness of those willing to ask questions. Filled with yearning for the infinite, they scan the heavens, find themselves marvelling at the brilliance of a star (...). The star left them with a question: Where is the child who has been born?

Brothers and sisters, the journey of faith begins whenever, by God's grace, we make room for the restlessness that keeps us awake and alert. It begins when we are willing to ask questions, when we

are dissatisfied with our daily routine and take seriously the challenges of each new day. When we step out of our comfort zone and decide to confront the uncomfortable aspects of life: our relationships with others, unexpected events, projects needing to be undertaken, dreams to be realized, fears to be faced, physical and mental sufferings. At such times, deep in our hearts, we find ourselves before the irrepressible questions that lead us to seek the Lord (...).

Yet each day the very air we breathe is full of "tranquilizers of the soul", surrogates meant to sedate our inner restlessness and to suppress those very questions (...). The danger is that we sedate our hearts, sedate our souls in order to quell our inner restlessness. God, however, is always there, there within our restless questioning. In that questioning, we "seek him as the night seeks the dawn... He is present in the silence that troubles us in the face of death and the end of all human grandeur. He is present in the longing for justice and love deep within our hearts. He is the holy mystery that responds to

our yearning for the Totally Other; a yearning for perfect and consummate justice, reconciliation and peace" (C.M. MARTINI) (...).

The second place is in the risk of journeying. (...) Benedict XVI said of the Magi: "Their outward pilgrimage was the expression of their inward journey, the inner pilgrimage of their hearts". The Magi in fact did not simply study the heavens and contemplate the light of the star; they set out on a journey full of risks, without safe roads and clear maps. (...)

The same is true of our faith: without a continuous journey in constant dialogue with the Lord, without attentive listening to his word, without perseverance, faith cannot grow. (...) Let us never forget that faith is a journey, a pilgrimage, a history of starts and restarts. Let us remind ourselves that a static faith does not grow, (...) we need to bring it outside and to live it in a constant journey towards God and towards our brothers and sisters. (...)

Finally, (...) the third place where we encounter the Lord is in the wonder of worship. At the end of their long journey and tiring quest, the Magi entered the house, where "they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage" (v. 11). This is what really matters: our restlessness, our questioning, our spiritual journeys and the practice of our faith must all converge in worship of the Lord.

There they find their centre and source, for there everything begins, for the Lord himself enables us to feel and act. (...)

The wonder of worship. Then we will learn to stand before God, not to ask for something or to do something, but simply to halt in silence and abandon ourselves to his love (...). We have lost the sense of worship because we have lost the courage to continue on our journey with all its risks. Today, the Lord calls us to imitate the Magi. Like the Magi, let us fall down and entrust ourselves to God in the wonder of worship. Let us worship God, not ourselves (...).

Brothers and sisters, let us open our hearts to restlessness, let us ask for the courage to continue our journey, and let us finish in worship! Let us not be afraid, for this is the path of the Magi, the path of all the saints throughout history: to welcome our restlessness, to set out and to worship. Brothers and sisters, may we never stop our restless questioning; may we never interrupt our journey by yielding to apathy or convenience; and in our encounter with the Lord, may we abandon ourselves to the wonder of worship. Then we will discover that a light shines even in the darkest nights: the light of Jesus, the radiant morning star, the sun of justice the merciful splendour of God, who loves every man and woman, and all the peoples of the earth. ■

## •\• Missioning with... •/•



...the community<sup>1</sup>  
of  
Fang  
Huay Bong  
Muangnam

**Our community, made up of the three residences of Fang, Huay Bong and Muangnam, held its community meeting on December 5 at the Fang Mission Centre.**

**We, the members try to meet regularly once in two months for building community, to share about our life and mission and also to share about our pastoral concerns.**

We are happy to share with you that in each of these parishes we have sisters belonging to different Religious Congregations assisting us in our socio-cultural, academic and Pastoral mission.

We would now share with you our different ministries carried out in different Parishes:

1) Presently, the members of the community are: Fr John Chokdee Damronganurak scj, Superior of the community and Parish Priest of Huay Bong; Fr. Peter Jirapat Rak-sikhao scj, Parish Priest of Muangnam; in Fang, Fr. Non-thapat Mayoe scj, Parish Priest, Fr. Rawee Permpoon-wicha scj, Assistant Priest, and Daniel Ratanachai Paya, for Pastoral experience at Fang Mission Centre.

## FANG MISSION

The Epiphany Catholic Church, Fang Parish originally belonged to the PIME Society for 46 years and then it was handed over to the Chiangmai Diocese. On 28th September 2019, the Epiphany Catholic Church, Fang mission was handed over to the Betharram Congregation by Rev. Bishop Francis Xavier Vira Apornratana, the Bishop of Chiangmai Diocese.

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The Parish Priest and the Assistant Parish Priest resides at the Centre.

- Furthermore, through Joseph, a descendant of David, Jesus belongs to the Family of David.
- St. Joseph learned to know and accept the Will of God which was revealed to him in the events and in his relationship with Mary, even if this would change his plans without him knowing exactly where this would lead him. The novitiate is the time to learn to know, love and live this will of God.
- St. Joseph was the formator of Jesus, with Mary, to make him a free, pious and responsible Jew.
- He formed Jesus with his silence, with his right and discreet words and work, to such an extent that Jesus was known by all as "the carpenter's son" or simply "the carpenter". The novices will be guided in their formation by the silence, by the words of wisdom and by the example of the Novice Master and the other members of the formation community.



• **Interregional Novitiate Community 2023**, from right to left: Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj, Master of novices, the four novices hailing from the Saint Michael Garicoïts Region and Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region – Br. Joyal Babu Joyal (IND), Br. Aimé Bogui (RCI), Br. Aymar Nambomesse (RCA), Br. Hubert SALLE (RCA) –, Fr. Pietro Felet scj, Regional Vicar, Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj, collaborator of the Master of novices.



## The very first steps of the scj missionaries in Thailand

Between the exodus from China and arriving in Northern Siam, the journey was long, uncertain and chaotic: after our expulsion from the Yunnan we had to go via Canton, Hong Kong and onto Rangoon before we could head for Bangkok and eventually reach Chiang Mai where the flying camp could, at last, be set up.

Letter from Fr Jean Saint-Guily scj to the Superior General, R. Fr. Denis Buzy scj :

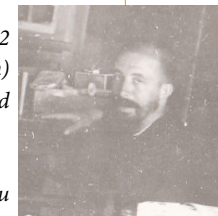
Chiang Mai, 4 January 1952  
Address: Catholic Mission (Siam)  
CHIENGMAI - Thailand

Very Reverend Father,  
I am rather late in offering you my good wishes and prayers for this coming year. [...]

You must be impatient for our news. Forgive our silence. It's because of our settling in here. And then I was also waiting to have something a bit more substantial to tell you. However, now that our situation is developing without too much difficulty, I no longer see any change and so what to tell you. We left Bangkok on December 7th at 6 p.m. on the express and arrived here on the 8th

at 3 p.m. Chiang Mai is good-sized town, once the capital of northern Siam. A good climate and pleasant countryside thanks to the wooded hills which surround the plain. The town is Siam's second largest in terms of importance and we can find everything we want here. Communications are very easy as well.

As the Fathers' residence is too small, after two nights spent on the verandah and after making a few essential purchases, we have moved into the offices of the former French consulate. An old bungalow, artistically all made of teak, in the middle of a tranquil garden. We are 10 minutes from the Catholic Mission, 8 minutes from the Ursuline convent (Roman congregation) and 15 minutes from the Brothers (the Montfort Brothers of St Gabriel) who are just beyond the Mission. As the house was empty, we had to buy everything from scratch and even now 3 Fathers are sleeping on the floor. What's more, there have been some difficulties of a domestic nature, not knowing about prices or the people or the language and also the lack of rapid organisation. [...] The 5 of us say our masses in the morning on 2 portable altars, pending getting a better one and even, I think, a small chapel.





For the moment, we are learning Siamese and have turned to the task wholeheartedly. This is going to be our principal task for the coming months. Afterwards, then what? I think that depending on the circumstances and what Mgr Chorin expects of us, we will be looking after the animist tribes who are in the area. There is quite a collection of them, some of whom are of the same people as those we were looking after in the south of the Tali Mission. In addition, there are the Karians, a people which in Burma turned out very good Christians, catechists and priests. [...] ■

One year later, Fr. Jean Saubatte scj wrote:

Bangkok, 9 January 1953

Very Reverend Father,

Please excuse my writing only this short note upon our arrival in Siam. After a very fraternal welcome from the Bangkok Fathers and Frs Londaitz and Fognini, we are getting ready to join the remaining 5 in Chiang Mai. I hope that we will all be glad to see one another again.

I return to the mission field with much contentment, although possibly less enthusiasm than if I had had the good fortune to return to my Shan district in China, among my much-loved Christians or pagans. Patience, that might happen one day.

Meanwhile, I can assure you that I am going to set about studying the language, made easier in part by my knowing Shan, and that I am hopeful of being able to get to work quite quickly in the areas where they are willing to accept us, pending assignment of the northern districts.

My two companions are as joyful as I am to have arrived on missionary soil. For them obviously

it's the novelty of the country, the magnificent exotic landscape, the people and places which capture their attention and enthusiasm. As for me, in spite of a few differences, I feel that I am once again seeing the familiar landscapes of China, the same faces (Siamese and Shan are from the same family), occasionally mixed with Chinese, the same rice-fields, etc.

May it please God that we are able to conduct our mission freely and deeply and harvest the fruits thereof too. One of the Fathers from here, Fr Meunier, a pioneer in the Northern Region, was telling me he personally believes it possible to

work effectively among the Northern peoples, especially because of their deep religious sense of the Divine.

Very Reverend Father, I take the liberty of offering you my most dutiful, albeit belated, best wishes for the New Year, which I entrust first of all to the Sacred Heart of course, to Our Lady

and our Saint.

We are praying for a successful Chapter and in particular that there are some concrete effective decisions taken about our mission. We place our trust in our representatives<sup>1</sup> to present our needs and wants, and in all the members of the Chapter so they may hear our case sympathetically.

Please remember me to the Reverend Fathers of the Council General; assure them of my respect and my gratitude for the help and interest shown to our mission and to me personally throughout my stay in France.

Very Reverend Father, please be assured of my filial devotion to the Sacred Heart and that you are in my prayers.

Fr. Saubatte S.C.J. ■

<sup>1</sup>) Fr. Jean Saint-Guily took part in the General Chapter of 1953 as Superior of the Mission as well as Fr. Felix Trezzi as delegate of the Superiors of the mission. The General Chapter also invited Mgr Lacoste to present his report at a special session.



under the protection of Saint Joseph (according to the choice of the community members). According to the Tradition, Joseph grew on this Land of David, where stands the Monastery of the Carmelite Sisters and where Saint Myriam of Jesus Crucified lived and died. One of her prophecies had indeed predicted the building of this house. This why the Betharramites feel called to live united by heart with the Carmel, where we have been chaplains for about a century and a half.

My journey to the Holy Land could not end without a visit to the Latin Patriarch, His Exc. Pizzaballa, to reaffirm our ecclesial communion. Then I went with Fr. Felet to the Calvary and Holy Sepulchre, the place of the Paschal mystery which is a source of light and hope for the whole world.

The last Christmas present was to participate with the community to the Dawn Mass in the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, (Saint Catherine), but more precisely to celebrate mass at 3.30 a.m. on the very spot of the crib where Jesus was born. We were with Fr. Stervin, the novices, and a group of Vietnamese who accompanied us and was praying there with a profound devotion. During this mass, I felt a consolation which I will never forget...

I have wished to share with you the gratuitous joy of a visit in the Land of Jesus. How much I would like to see many Betharramites live this experience of praying, discerning and ripening in their religious life at the feet of the Divine Master, abased and obedient ! It would be the opportunity to share the same happiness with the others. ■

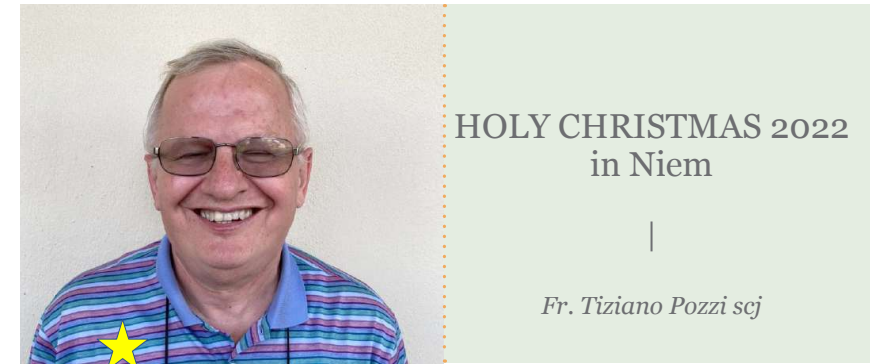
## The interregional novitiate of Bethlehem is named after St. Joseph

On December 23, 2022, the community of the long-awaited interregional novitiate in the Holy Land, during a celebration presided over by the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agin SCJ, officially inaugurated the novitiate under the protection of St. Joseph.

The name of the novitiate was decided in a meeting of the novices and formators with the Superior General in which everyone had the opportunity to express their opinion. The name of "St. Joseph Interregional Novitiate" was chosen for the following reasons:

- We are in Bethlehem, the city of David, where Joseph went to answer the Emperor Augustus' census, and since he was a descendant of David's family. Our house in Bethlehem, which is the house of the novitiate, was built right on the Hill of David.





★ This Christmas, I decided to do things in a big way: I will go to choose your gifts in a *boutique*. ★ Yes, our hospital has modernized, as have Italian hospitals, because we also have our shop: Abdouramane's *boutique*.

Arriving here more than a year ago, Abdouramane is a patient with heart disease and needs ongoing care. As he comes from a very remote village, a serious problem immediately arose: "If I have to stay here in the hospital, how will I take care of my family? Who will give them what they need in future?" These were Abdouramane's worries. After a few weeks, he asked me if he could open a small shop inside the hospital, something that no one had asked me during the 30 years I have been here. Of course, it was impossible to say no to him.

Abdouramane duly opened his *boutique*. It is a very special shop: it has no doors, no windows, no bright lights. It opens up at sunrise and is packed away at sunset. All the merchandise fills two boxes. But there is a bit of everything and it does a good service to the hospitalized patients, who are always numerous. The hospital has 90 beds but the number of patients always exceeds 100.

Coffee, soap, sugar, salt, cubes of broth, washing detergent.... and even sweets for the little ones. I confess that I have become Abdouramane's accomplice in a way. When I go to town, he prepares his list for me, gives me the necessary money, and I bring back everything he needs for his shop.

The other day, I told him that Christmas was coming and that I would be stopping by to buy gifts for my Italian friends: he was to get some nice things in for me. I do

"What a joy when I was told: 'We will go to the House of the Lord !' Now our march is ending in front of your doors, Jerusalem !" (Ps.121, 1-2).

What a grace the Lord was granting us, after waiting for two and a half years! Indeed, this project had been conceived as early as 2019. Along the way, it was enriched with a discernment process, to which several of our brothers participated in order to make an appealing proposition of Betharramite training in this very important step of the vocation which is noviciate.

Its inter-regional character was born from the desire to cultivate our family spirit. Its aim was also to offer a strong training to our religious identity. At last, proposing a noviciate in the Holy Land placed us in contact with our charismatic roots: the Word's Incarnation, the Crib, the Calvary, Emmaüs, etc...

Amidst many difficulties, Fr. Etchecopar had succeeded in obtaining from Pope Leon XIII, - thanks to the intercession of Saint Myriam of Jesus Crucified, the coming of the Betharramites in this dreamed Land.

The novices started their progress on this January 1st. They will have the opportunity to live a transfiguring experience in the steps of the Only Master and Lord, when living it on His own Land. To strengthen the experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, they will contemplate closely the very landscapes Jesus contemplated, and they will pray the Abba as Jesus did. They will offer themselves to the Lord with Jesus on the Calvary, and they will feel their hearts consumed with the Joy of the Ressuscitated. How much Jesus has loved us !

The noviciate has been placed

not know if he knows where Italy is, but his eyes lit up with joy. He said, "thank you" at least ten times and immediately offered me a pack of coffee and some sugar lumps.

We are in the middle of the night now: it is a beautiful night, dotted with stars, one of those nights that can only be seen here. From the village comes the sound of drums accompanied by people singing, especially children. But I'm going to have to leave because I have one more important thing to do. I need to focus on making my gift list for you: it's a long list, full of faces, friends... A special gift for each of you. It will take me all night to finish. And tomorrow morning, Abdouramane will be waiting for me...

Then in a few days, a star, bigger and brighter than all the others, will appear. It will lead us to Bethlehem where the Child Jesus awaits us, to warm our hearts. Then he will say these simple words: Never tire of doing good.

My best wishes for a Merry and Holy Christmas to each of you and your loved ones.

With affection as ever,

*Abdouramane*

*P.S. On the photo which accompanies this article, you can see Abdouramane's shop with his son Issa (a first name which means Jesus...).*



## A Christmas novitiate in the Land of the Lord

*Fr. Eduardo Gustavo Agín scj*

**We are in December, Xmas is drawing near, and the Lord's Mercy grants me a special grace : to accompany the opening of the Saint Joseph inter-regional Novitiate of Bethlehem.**

A further gift : this inauguration was preceded by a visit to Nazareth (about 150km away). Fr. Jacky Moura welcomed us in the House of Nazareth. We celebrated mass in the Carmel with the sisters, then we conversed with the community. In the evening, with Fr. Pietro Felet, I participated to a procession by torchlight towards the Grotto of Mary, the Basilica of the Annunciation. An international group prayed the Rosary for peace, for the poor, for the unity of the Church, for everyone. It was with great emotion that the Gospel of the Annunciation was proclaimed, here, in the very spot where the faithful venerate the *Ecce Ancilla* of Mary and the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus, both contained in this great mystery.

We had to think of coming back. We crossed Jericho, without stopping, to go on towards Bethlehem. After crossing Jerusalem, we passed through Beit Jala, a town of the seminary where the Betharramite Fathers had worked as trainors and teachers for years.

We arrived in the house where we found the newly formed community again : the four novices, Hubert, Aimé, Aymar and Joyal, coming from the Saint Michael Garicoïts and the Saint Mary of Jesus-Crucified Regions. With them, the Master of the novices, Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj. And Fr. Gaspar Fernandez Pérez scj., his eminent assistant. Together, we lived several initiation meetings planned for the novitiate, listening to the novices' expectations, and offering them a program of work consistent with the requests of Today's Church. In the beautiful chapel of the house, the songs were ringing to the rhythm of the tom-toms, to prepare Christmas :