



O Mary, here we come.
Receive us and present us to
your divine Son.

Saint Michael Garicoïts

July 28 | Happy Feast of Our Lady
of the Beautiful Branch!



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A Chapter that adds a Thai flavor to our rich history

*"Enlarge the space of your tent, without delay and stretch out the canvas,
lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes;
because you will spread to the right and to the left.
Your offspring will conquer the nations
and will repopulate the deserted cities."
(Is 54.2-3)*

Dear Betharramites:

After having celebrated the XXVIII General Chapter in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where we have shared and tried to guide the life of our Religious Family for the next six years, we are now preparing to begin work again.

It has been an event of grace, a time of the Spirit, in which we have all felt called to serve our brethren both religious and lay, firstly listening to them, then dialoguing and discerning. On behalf of you all, I thank the availability of the participants during this Chapter, as well as the welcome and collaboration of all those who helped to make it possible in this wonderful land of mission that is Thailand. We will always remember the flavor of Thai food, the warmth of its people and the atmosphere of joyful brotherhood.

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

Since Jesus, humble and obedient, walks with us, I have asked all the Capitulants to express it as Saint Michael Garicoits expressed it: *“Be filled with his Spirit and his ways. Act in Him and like Him, with boundless trust and abandon. [...] Appropriating the project of the Lord and trying to follow it”* (Corr. I, c. 97).

Back in 2017 General Chapter had asked us to **“go out to meet life”**. Which means: going out to drink from the same source; going out to share and organise ourselves better; going out to meet each person and going into the margins; going out to share the same joy; getting out of ourselves to share good news. Finally, it invited us to watch over Betharram, the Mother House in France, called to be a place of encounter and mission for the whole Congregation.

Since then, the Congregation has tried to “go out”. Many joys accompanied the path travelled, but also a six-year term full of tests, great surprises and unexpected challenges. However, our hopes for the future are still intact; we feel more united and we know that we are not alone. Today’s Betharramites were called to be *witnesses to the love of Christ at a time of great changes*, and though it is a complex task, I believe that in the face of challenges we have always been moved by a generous spirit, like that of Saint Michael Garicoits and Fr. Etchecopar, who did not stop in front of any obstacle to seek, find and fulfill the will of God for our religious family.

In the last six-year term, the Church’s magisterium, with Pope Francis, encouraged us to go forward, to go out and serve everyone, without flagging. He invited us to encounter the little ones, those who are alone, those who are excluded, the vulnerable, in short: towards all kinds of people in the margins. The Holy Father wants a religious life that is characterised by prophecy. The Chapter committed us: to be custodians of the *Common Home*, to protect children and vulnerable people, to support the elderly, to share more with our lay brothers, and to be welcoming through our mission in community. This is what we have been called to do: *enlarge the space of our tents, extend the ropes and fix the pegs well, so we can also be ready to rise up and be a mobile camp moving towards the promised land, following the Holy Spirit who dwells in the desert cloud.* (cf. Is 54, 2-3)

He also invites us to be **Good Samaritans to our neighbour**:

“There are peripheries that are close to us, in the centre of the city, or in the family itself. There is also an aspect of the universal openness of love that is not geographical but experiential. It is the daily ability to widen my circle, to reach those who don’t easily feel part of my world of interests, even though they

Fr. Eduardo Gustavo Agin scj, re-elected Superior General, and his new Council.



From left to right: Fr. Graziano Sala scj, Bursar General, re-elected for a 3rd term and reconfirmed Secretary General, Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj, re-elected Vicar General, Fr. Gustavo Agin, Superior General, Fr. John Chan Kumu scj, elected Councillor General for missionary cooperation, Fr. Stervin Fernando Selvass scj, re-elected Councillor General for formation.

- In accordance with RL.190, the re-elected Superior General convened his Council to appoint the member of the Council who would assume **the role of Secretary General**. Fr. Graziano Sala scj, re-elected Bursar General, has agreed to resume this service for the next six years.
- The second act of the new General Administration was to **launch the consultation of the religious in view of the appointment of the Regional Superiors and their Vicars (RL. 205/j)**, by a letter of the Superior General of 29 June, given to the Regional Superiors and Regional Vicars, still in charge, who will send it to **all perpetually professed religious**. **The religious should send their consultation bulletin to the General Secretary in Rome by August 15th. The various appointments are scheduled for September at a session of the new full General Council (30 August to 4 September).**
- **In accordance with the Rule of Life, the Acts of the General Chapter will be released by the Superior General. The French edition is in progress and will be completed by the end of the month. Translations into the different languages of the Congregation will follow as soon as possible, thanks to the cooperation of all.** The acts, including the report of the Superior General on the past six years, will be submitted to the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. **To enter into force, the amendments made to certain articles of the Rule of Life and voted by the General Chapter must be approved by the said Dicastery.**



In the Peace of the Lord

Some of our brothers have recently lost a beloved one. We accompany them with our prayers for their dear departed:

in Argentina | *Mr. Jorge Angarola*, father of Br. Gustavo Angarola SCJ.

in Ivory Coast | *Mr. Désiré Assanvo*, Deacon Emmanuel Assanvo’s father SCJ.

Mr Serge Bruno Ségla, young brother of Fr Raoul Thibaut Ségla SCJ.



an occasion (for the first time, if I am not mistaken) to share the time of the Chapter with our young people in formation. The chapter members, thus had "breathed" the air of newness brought by our younger generations who are turning to religious life.

The young people, for their part, had the opportunity to discover the international and multicultural face of the Congregation. Some had touched with their finger the freshness of the charism which is increasingly embodied in Thailand. The others had the opportunity to

be in contact with the experience of their elders.

This does not only deal with the organization, but the formative experience for one another, based not on words or conferences, but on the example of life and the power of signs.

Everyone returns to his community with the happy conscience that we have helped each other in different ways.

Thank you all! ■

are close to me. Thus, every sister and brother who suffers, is abandoned or ignored by my society is in practice an outsider, even if they were born in the same country. They may be full-fledged citizens, but they are made to feel like foreigners in their own land. Racism is a virus that mutates easily and instead of disappearing it hides itself, but it is always lurking" (FT 97).

In this ecclesial context, **we Betharramites** want to respond by renewing ourselves in our own **charismatic identity**. We have a lively and dynamic charism that tends towards encounter.

"A Betharramite is a volunteer... St. Michael wanted only volunteers. Because? Because it is about surrendering to God. And only freely can one surrender to God. It is about committing to follow the Heart of Jesus; and to commit to follow it you need to really want it. It is about saying: Ecce Venio, like Him; no one can be forced to say: Ecce Venio; that would be false, and would not make any sense. Ultimately, the important thing is to love. Can you force yourself to love? "for love more than for any other reason".

A Betharramite is a man who always says "yes" (= Ecce Venio): ... he has given up simply acting as the mood takes him ... he is always ready ... he goes out even if it costs him, even if he is afraid ...

A Betharramite is a man without pretensions. He works a lot, but without looking to stand out: he doesn't work for himself...

A Betharramite is a happy man. He has given up many things but never happiness... " (Rev Fr. Joseph Mirande-NEF N° 146-March 1965)

In Betharram there is no lack of strength to be a "community on mission". New vocations in the religious family are a blessing. In Chiang Mai we have seen and felt the joy of the Thai brothers and their sense of celebration, their respect for the authorities and for their predecessors, their missionary spirit, their feeling that they are *Church on the way*, in dialogue with other religions, in a country where Catholics constitute a small but significant minority.

Our family on the one hand is ageing, but on the other is renewed year after year. Although forty-five (45) religious died in the last six-year period, new ordinations and final professions followed one another: in this period there have been thirty-one (31). In addition, we celebrated two more priestly ordinations in the Chiang Mai Cathedral and they look forward to celebrating a diaconate there in August. A deacon

in South America has been ordained a priest and two other religious in Africa have been ordained, one a priest and the other a deacon, this month. There will also be two African perpetual professions in September and October. Thus, our congregational face -which has a few wrinkles- is gradually rejuvenating.

The cultural richness of the brothers from Africa, Asia and South America, also comes to give new colour to a Betharram that in its origins was more European and monochromatic. Mission is opening up new perspectives, among the poorest, those alone and excluded from society. The involvement of religious and laity together grows with a view to giving rise to a synodal Church. All this has invited us to live a different Chapter, with spaces for everyone, especially for the new and the "little ones".

For this, it was also necessary to listen to those with the experience of having worked for many years at the service of our religious family. How can we not value their practical wisdom and service? They are the ones who never retire... those of the "Here I am" without reservation.

Thus we have lived a Chapter "with a Thai flavour" that has once again enriched our Betharramite history. Beyond our personal differences, we have felt challenged by the same desire: that this family of Betharram continue living the challenge of *being light of the world and salt of the earth in a world that reaches for God but no longer remembers his taste*.

Now, having resumed our common path together with the People of God, we need more than ever to load our backpacks with the gifts of the Spirit and the strength of our charism to welcome those by the roadside with the same humility, love and gentleness that Saint Michael Garicoits wanted for his children.

On behalf of the new General Council, and all the members of the Chapter, I send you my fraternal embrace and my blessing.

In Corde Iesu

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General



A happy and meaningful collaboration

P. Graziano Sala scj

If I had to narrate a characteristic of this General Chapter, I would speak of the presence of pre-postulants, postulants and deacons', who have been close to us at all times and who, by their concrete help, have contributed that nothing essential was missing to the Chapter Fathers in the unfolding of the Chapter: a group of efficient young people, available and smiling.

From morning to evening, the group was present at our different community moments : from morning mass to evening meal. For any necessity, we could rely on them: make photocopies, currency exchange, driving the chapter members to the places of community outings (for the ordinations of our deacons and the visits to Maepon and Chomthong).

How can we forget the help that they have rendered to us?

The members of the Chapter had

1) Our brothers, Phanupan and Phichet, were ordained priests on June 17th, in the cathedral in Chiang Mai.



More than ever, the charism of Saint Michael Garicoits is contemporary. In a world that doesn't know where it's heading, in a world of frenzied rushing, in a world of violence, the tenderness of God and the humility of God are blocks¹ on which to build a life, blocks on which we lean on to reveal how much God loves our world, how much every man, especially every person who is poor, sick, migrant, has value in the eyes of God. "To provide others with the same happiness" has never had so much force in the face of spiritual poverty as it does in the face of the spiritual thirst of our contemporaries. This calls us, together, to always be available, open and to listen.

We want to express to you all our fraternal gratitude for what you are, for all that you give to the great family of Betharram, for the bold gestures that you want to make with us for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Forward then! Let us not be afraid to say together: "Here I am, out of love!" Let us not be afraid to continue to walk together with the richness of our different vocations!

May Our Lady of Betharram, Saint Michael Garicoits help us to be servants and witnesses, artisans of communion!

Faternally,

Members of the General Chapter 2023

*Chiang Mai, The Seven Fountains, 29 June 2023
(excerpt from the Acts)*

¹) Cf. Is 54.2-3



•\• Chiang Mai General Chapter, 2023 •/\•



Chapter Proceedings

Excerpt from the Acts of the General Chapter in preparation

On **Thursday 8** June, the capitulants were welcomed by the brothers of the Vicariate of Thailand who were happy that such an event was taking place in their country of smiles! Despite some last-minute visa difficulties for a few individuals, everyone gathered at the Jesuit Spiritual Centre of Chiang Mai, called *The Seven Fountains*.

Arpndratana, Bishop of the Diocese of Chiang Mai. He presided over the solemn Eucharistic celebration of the opening of the Chapter. Many religious brothers from the Betharram Vicariate of Thailand participated in this liturgy which was animated by the scholastics from our formation house in Sampran.

The **next morning** at 8 am, the opening prayer brought together all the capitulants in the chapel of the Centre. Lengthy excerpts from Pope Francis' homily on the occasion of the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday 2023 at St Peter's Basilica in Rome inspired everyone's meditation. At 10am in accordance with local customs, the capitulants welcomed Bishop Francis Xavier Vira

In the afternoon, all the capitulants gathered in the carefully prepared chapter hall. This was the inaugural session of the Chapter presided over by our Superior General, Father Eduardo Gustavo Agín. After lighting candles at the foot of the statue of the Sacred Heart and a time of prayer as well as verifying the presence of all the delegates, he officially declared the 28th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart



of Jesus of Bétharram open. This was followed by the organization of the assembly's work, including the election of scrutineers, secretaries for the Chapter and members of the Chapter Coordination Commission.

The day of **Saturday 10** June was devoted to listening to the reports of the various Regional Superiors. After each report, there was a time of exchange where the assembly could ask for clarification or share reactions in an atmosphere of attentive listening. A communication team was also been set up to provide news updates on the www.betharram.net website.

The next day, **Sunday 11** June, after the morning Eucharist,



the capitulants were invited to be in a receptive mood for the Superior General's report. Fr. Gustavo Agín presented his report in three stages. After each part, he left a time of silence to allow for a personal re-reading of his text and then a space to give each capitulant the opportunity to share how the report resonated with him and spoke to him about the work of the Holy Spirit. In the last part of the day, the General Bursar, Fr. Graziano

Sala, presented the economic report. The day was characterized by an atmosphere of listening.

On **Monday 12** June, a day of recollection and silence began. Father Miguel Garaizabal, Superior of the Jesuits in Thailand and a friend of Betharram,



WALKING TOGETHER,

LAITY AND RELIGIOUS OF BETHARRAM

Dear friends of the great family of Betharram,

To share in depth with you the experience of a General Chapter would be very difficult, since this lengthy time of listening and sharing was so rich. But one thing we can say very firmly: you were very present at the heart of our debates, our reflections and our times of prayer.

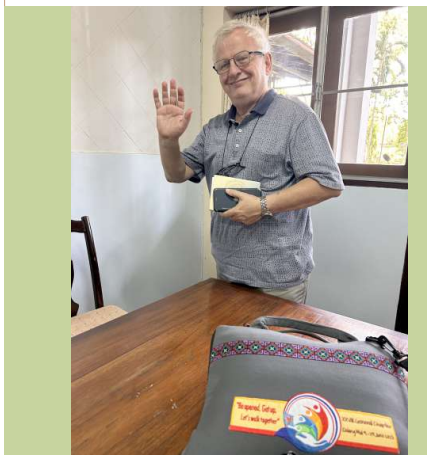
What would we be without your presence by our side? What would we be without the many collaborations experienced together in so many human, fraternal, educational, pastoral, spiritual fields? What would we be without this sharing of the charism of Saint Michael Garicoïts? Where would we be without this mutual support to carry together the joys, fears, sorrows and hopes of men and women today? What would we be?... Isn't it a synodal walk that we share and live together?

The theme of the General Chapter "Be opened! Get up! Let's walk together" invites us not to give up in the heart of this fractured world, certainly, but a world where so many gestures of healing are made, where so many free presences come to restore confidence to those who are waiting for a word, a call to regain a little dignity, a taste for living with self esteem. How many of our missionary places are like a lamp that illuminates, guides and reassures!



and former seminarians of Betharram also participated in this celebration. At the end of the Mass, a time of mutual presentation made it possible to get to know each other better. A festive meal, joined by the Bishop of Chiang Mai, brought together all the guests in the beautifully prepared and decorated courtyard of Ban Betharram. Everyone took part participated in the festivities. Each Vicariate offered one or two songs in their own language to celebrate the universal dimension of the Betharram Congregation. It was a moment of joy, simplicity, sharing and gratitude for all that the Vicariate of Thailand had done to ensure the successful outcome of the Chapter. A prayer concluded this beautiful evening prepared by the Vicariate of the Land of Smiles, a smile that could be seen

on the face of St. Michael Garicoits himself. Could this have been a final nod from this Chapter to the entire Congregation of Betharram? May Betharram become a Congregation of smiles! ■



gave two lectures in the morning. The first was an introduction to the Church's synodal experience referring to the texts of Pope Francis. The second was a presentation of synodal discernment as an experience of communion and participation by all, the only thing capable of helping us to renew our mission today.

At the end of the morning, a time was left for questions or reactions between the assembly and the speaker. The first part of the afternoon was left to silence and reflection. At 5pm, the capitulants met in the hall to watch a video that told of the life and mission of the first missionaries of Betharram in Thailand after their expulsion from China. From Dalí to Chiang Mai, thanks to the zeal and enthusiasm of the missionaries, the mustard seed sown in Thailand in 1951 has now become a tree. Fr. Sa-at scj, who is in







charge of the Vietnamese community and invited to participate in the entire Chapter, was asked to present the reality, life and mission of the religious of Betharram in Vietnam.

The morning of **Tuesday 13 June** began with a personal time to review all the reports and conferences from the retreat. Then, by language group (Italian, French, English, Spanish), the capitulants met to begin identifying the fundamental themes which, once approved by the assembly, would then be developed. At the end of the afternoon, everyone reconvened in the chapter hall for an initial sharing of the groups' work and to begin envisioning the different possible themes.

The next morning, building on the previous day's discussions, the language groups met again to try to better define and refine the points to be explored in the coming days.

In assembly, the capitulants voted on the choice of themes. In assembly, the capitulants voted for the choice of themes. Based on the Chapter's theme, three working groups emerged around the ideas of, "Be opened!" "Get up!" and "Let's walk together!" During the day, the assembly approved the continuation of the programme for the upcoming days of the General Chapter and then elected a Commission for the drafting of the Acts of the 28th General Chapter.

On 15 and 16 June, the theme-based groups worked. Each capitulant chose the group they wanted to participate in. A general assembly was held each day to review the reflections of each group, fostering a collective way of moving forward together! The capitulants did not miss the opportunity to celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart with morning Eucharist



and evening Vespers. Dinner was a convivial moment with some refreshing drinks and ice cream!

On **Saturday 17** June, the Chapter's work was suspended to experience a significant moment for the Church at Chiang Mai Cathedral on the occasion of the celebration of four priestly ordinations presided over by the local bishop, assisted by two other bishops. Two of our brothers from the Vicariate of Thailand were ordained priests. After the celebration, a festive meal was enjoyed on site. At about 2.30 p.m., all the capitulants went to the cemetery to pray at the graves of six missionaries from Betharram. Then the whole group gathered at Ban Betharram to and rest and recuperate. At 4 pm, the

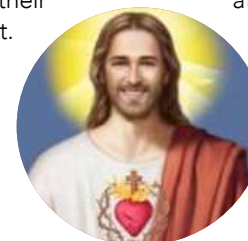
Regional Vicar of Thailand, Father Chan Kunu, made a presentation about the life and reality of the Thai Vicariate. At 6 pm, a time of prayer was offered with the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament. A dinner in the courtyard of Ban Betharram concluded a beautiful, sunny and warm day before returning to the Centre.

On **Sunday 18** June, the work of the Chapter resumed. After a brief general assembly, each group met to prepare an initial presentation of their work. At 4:30 pm, all the capitulants gathered in a general assembly to begin listening to the different contributions from the groups. The group focused on the theme, "Let's walk together" presented their contribution, followed by a debate.



assembly. The Acts were voted on and Fr. Eduardo Gustavo Agin, Superior General, officially closed the Chapter. Joy was evident on everyone's faces for the work done together throughout the Chapter. After the meal, the three delegates from the Vicariate of India left the Chapter, as their visas expired at midnight. In the afternoon, a Eucharist was celebrated in thanksgiving for this Chapter and for the anniversary of the priestly ordination of some capitulants.

The last day of the General Chapter was the Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul. Free time was given to allow some to complete the secretariat's work, and for others to have regional meetings. Everyone gathered at Ban Betharram for the final celebration at 5 pm. The Eucharist was presided over by the two newly ordained priests. The great majority of the religious of the Vicariate were present as well as the scholastics and postulants. Religious congregations, benefactors





On the picture: the 34 members of the General Chapter (ex officio members, elected members and one guest member).

On the right: two of the three interpreters (Fr. Angelo Recalcati scj and Mr. Fernando Caballero, from Paraguay).

Barbara, English-French interpreter (sister of Fr Austin scj) had to leave on June 22.

with the presentation and vote on the motion for the Cause of Canonization of the Venerable Father Auguste Etchecopar.

On **Sunday 25** June the Chapter suspended its work to celebrate the Lord's Day at Maepon in the morning and Chomthong in the evening, after visiting two small tourist sites. All the capitulants were touched by the hospitality of our brothers and Christian communities. It was a brief immersion into the Kariane land where the memory of the first missionaries was present, as the seed sown continues to grow.

After this beautiful day of visits and sharing, the delegates gathered to continue studying the various motions to be presented to the assembly. During the morning, three motions were debated and voted on: Vietnam, the Holy Land and the economy. The first part of the afternoon was left to

the small committees to prepare the texts of the motions to be presented. Subsequently, in assembly, a motion regarding the site of Betharram was passed.

On **Tuesday 27** June, the Chapter continued to vote on various motions: "The protection of minors and vulnerable people"; "Caring for creation and the common home"; "Education"; "Scholasticate of Abidjan"; "Financial autonomy of the young Vicariates"; a letter¹ entitled "Let's walk together, lay people and religious of Bétharram". The working day ended with the vote to modify certain articles of the Rule of Life to fit in with canon law.

On **Wednesday 28** June, the work of the Chapter came to an end. The Acts of the 28th General Chapter were presented and read to the entire

¹) See on page 19.

On **Monday 19** June, after the Eucharist celebrated as usual at 7:00am, the capitulants met up to work again in assembly. The "Get up!" group on the one hand, and the "Be opened!" group on the other, presented their contributions in turn, followed by an exchange of reactions, proposals or requests for clarification. It was decided that in the early afternoon, each group would be given time to address the remarks or proposals made in the general assembly. At 4:30pm, everyone gathered together to let the group "be opened!" present the second part of their contribution. This was followed by a time for exchange and debate. In addition, the capitulants took note of the procedures for the election of the Superior General and his council,

scheduled for the following day, as well as the programme for the election day. As every evening, the work concluded with the prayer of Vespers in the chapel.

Tuesday 20 June was dedicated to the election of the Superior General and his council. All capitulants met in the chapter hall at 8:30am. The day of election began with an invocation to the Holy Spirit accompanied by the *Veni Creator*. Father Eduardo Gustavo Agin was re-elected as the Superior General of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram for a term of six years. He made the Profession of Faith and took the Oath of Fidelity, as required by the Church and the Rule of Life. Then, all the capitulants met in the chapel for a prayer of



Election Day of the Superior General and the General Council.

20 June 2023

Before the election of the Superior General and his Council, all members of the Chapter (except invited members) swear a solemn oath on the Bible.

On the photo: the Dean of the 2023 General Chapter, Fr. Pietro Felet scj.



thanksgiving during which the Superior General washed the feet of twelve religious representatives of all the Regions and Vicariates of the Congregation. In the afternoon, the General Chapter elected the four councillors. The day concluded with the Mass of the Holy Spirit, presided over by the Superior General, surrounded by the four members of the new General Council.

On **Wednesday 21** June, the work resumed with a general assembly at 8:30am. As every morning, the minutes of the previous session were read by the secretaries and voted on after allowing time for amendments. A short debate followed to discuss the drafting of the texts from each group for the assembly's vote. The capitulants decides to postpone the presentation of the various texts to be voted on until the following morning. It was decided that the afternoon would be a time of relaxation and joy

for everyone! The prayer of Vespers was held at the same time.

Thursday **22 June** was devoted to the presentation of each group's work for the Chapter to vote on each text presented after allowing time for amendments. It was an intense day of debate and listening. The assembly was able to vote on the texts from the "Be opened" and "Get up" groups. Given the time, Vespers were celebrated in the chapter room. On **Friday 23** June, the "Let's Walk Together" group presented their report. After debating the various amendments, the text was approved by the capitulants.

On **24 June**, the Solemnity of St John the Baptist, the Chapter took the time to address other topics in preparation for motions to be submitted to the capitulants: the presence in Vietnam, the presence in the Holy Land. The day concluded