

In this issue

Community in mission: Let us walk together p. 1

New Betharramite finally professed members from the Ivory Coast p. 5

The ministry (mission) accomplished by religious and diocesans: differences and practical applications p. 12

Called and sent: Answer "Here I am!" where the Lord asks us p. 14

Could we become "missionaries" through the mass media? And what conditions should we observe? p. 16

Experience of a community in mission p. 19

We are not tied to any particular work p. 22

The voice of the founder p. 28

The word of the superior general

Community in mission: Let us walk together

"After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others, and he sent them on ahead of him two by two to all the towns and places where he had to go." (Lk 10.1)

Dear Betharramites,

One of the most beautiful articles that our General Chapter produced in Chiang Mai 2023 is the one called: *Community in Mission* "**Let us walk together**" (Acts of Gen Chap '23 - No. 110-126). The delegates of the working group presented us with a synthesis that, more than a programme, is a reflection on our lifestyle, which begins with a *dream*, looking to the future.

It does so, furthermore, from our most genuine identity and reminds us that we are Betharram religious sent on mission, in a time of post-secularism, in which indifference and nostalgia for a God who is near, are like two poles that touch each other... the extremes.

This chapter three begins with a strong expression:

"We dream of living in meaningful, open, welcoming, dialoguing, witnessing and attractive communities, which favour life, encounter and communion. In the mission of Betharram, the Chapter emphasises the recovery of the community dimension as fundamental to our life as consecrated people. "...(we)...reveal to the men of our time the tenderness and mercy, the loving face of God-Father." (Rule of Life n. 9) Here the mission of Betharram is expressed. Faced with that, we want to walk together, because it is our way of being a community, living the gospel of Jesus Christ."

And he adds that *"the traits that should characterise the Betharramite communities are:*

- 1. Synodality as a lifestyle.*
- 2. Mysticism of the encounter.*
- 3. Missionary spirit.*
- 4. Permanent conversion."*

We Betharramites live in **communities in mission**, we were called to **share** the work for the Kingdom of God. We have a common experience that is our charism and our consecrated vocation which is called to bear fruit.

I have felt great satisfaction when hearing from the Betharramite brothers gathered in Chiang Mai the desire to recover this community dimension, which is also a request of the Church today to all Religious Life, since the church needs it as a sign of *communion, participation and mission* among the People of God walking alongside them.

We Betharramites, religious and lay, cannot ignore this *fundamental element* of religious life that we can summarise as follows: **the apostolate of religious is essentially communal**. The Church reiterates it when it calls us "experts in communion" citing the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis also frequently emphasises it before religious people:

"Consecrated life is an expert in communion; consecrated life is itinerant, it is a promoter of fraternity." (Virtual meeting with the religious of Latin America and the Caribbean 2021)

I share here an ecclesial document that describes this essential element very clearly: Essential Elements of Religious Life (EE), no. 25.

*“Whatever the apostolic service through which the word is transmitted, the mission is undertaken as a community responsibility. **It is to the institute as a whole that the Church entrusts participation in the mission of Christ, which is characteristic of it and is expressed through the works inspired by the founding charism.** This corporate mission does not mean that all members of the institute do the same things or that people’s qualities and gifts are not respected. It means that the activity of all members is directly related to the common apostolate, which - as the Church has recognised - concretely expresses the purpose of the Institute. This common and permanent apostolate is part of the healthy tradition of the institute. It is so closely related to identity that it cannot be changed without touching the very character of the institute. **It is, therefore, the touchstone in the evaluation of new works, whether these services are to be performed by a group or individually.** Major superiors are especially responsible for the integrity of the common apostolate: they must ensure that the institute is both faithful to its traditional mission in the Church and open to new ways of carrying it out. The works need to be renewed and revitalised, but this must be done while always remaining faithful to the approved apostolate of the institute and in collaboration with the corresponding ecclesiastical authorities. Such renewal must be marked by the four great fidelities, highlighted in the document Religious and Human Promotion: ‘fidelity to humanity and our time; fidelity to Christ and the Gospel; fidelity to the Church and its mission in the world; fidelity to the religious life and the charism of the institute’ (RHP 13)”.*

What the EE document raises is interesting because it takes us directly to the topic of **discernment**, also present in Chapter 3, of the Acts of the General Chapter '23 and which concludes with the enumeration of some very important criteria to authentically discern our mission.

“Criteria for the discernment of people and works:

a) Human and practical possibilities of living in a fraternal community.

b) Availability, characteristic of our Betharramite spirituality, reminds us that there are no immovable or indispensable religious.

c) Religious sent to other cultures must cultivate the necessary dispositions of inculturation and be trained for the place and the mission entrusted to them. Likewise, communities must be prepared and prepared to welcome and integrate them (XXVII° General Chapter 2017, no. 139-140).

d) That what is proposed can be translated into concrete projects in each vicariate."

Acts of the General Chapter '23 - No. 137.

The missionary Jesus sends us "to the towns where he was due to go" and not where each one prefers! If that were the case we would not be listening to Christ but to the voices of a supposed religious professionalism concerned with preserving our good reputation rather than going out boldly to meet Life.

The General Chapter has awakened us and invites us to 'free ourselves from ourselves' and helps us remember that we are a **community in mission**, because, if not, we could call ourselves Betharramites but we would not be who we really are: the religious life.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

Superior General

QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY REFLECTION:

1. *Do you feel part of a community in mission? How? Why? What would it take to become one?*
2. *The discernment of the last few years in your vicariate: has it led to living in communities in mission or has it unconsciously favoured individualism?*
3. *In your religious community: do you frequently hear "we", or rather "I"?*



New Betharramite finally professed members from the Ivory Coast

Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj, Vicar General, on behalf of the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agin scj, received the final vows of Br. Hyacinthe Akpa N'Cho scj (Saturday 16 September, in Adiopodoumé) and, a few weeks later, the final vows of Br. Jean-Claude Djiraud scj (October 1, Betharram).

With their "Here I am", our Ivorian brothers have made a definitive commitment in the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, surrounded, for the occasion, by relatives and friends, as well as by the Fathers and Brothers of the Vicariate where they reside.

Let us give thanks to the Lord who continues to call workers in his harvest through our Congregation.

Best wishes to Br. Hyacinthe and Br. Jean-Claude!



Br. Hyacinthe N'cho Akpa scj: I was born on 17 August 1983 in Agboville, a town located in the south of the Ivory Coast and it was here that I spent all my childhood years, with my parents, six sisters and two brothers.

After completing my secondary school studies, I went off to university in Abidjan, the business capital of Ivory Coast. Once settled in Abidjan, I joined the vocations group at St Andrew's Cathedral in Yopougon. Yopougon is one of the townships that make up Abidjan and is also one of the Roman Catholic dioceses in the Ivory Coast

(Diocese of Yopougon) with Mgr Jean Salomon Lézoutier as its Bishop. The vocations group helps members through discernment to choose their calling in life. And so it was at the Cathedral in 2013 that I first heard about the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram.

In fact it was that year that the vocations group received an invitation to visit the community of Adiopodoumé, one of the SCJ communities and its formation house in Ivory Coast, in connection with the celebrations for the 150th Anniversary of St Michael's entry into Heaven. (Adiopodoumé is a village located within the township of Yopougon). After the Welcome and Installation, our celebrations commenced with teaching delivered by Fr Sylvain: moving from the Heart of God to the Heart of the World by way of the Heart of Jesus. God is nothing but Love, in His Heart there is nothing but Love; Jesus is nothing but Love and His Heart contains nothing but love and this love is the same Love that He Himself has received from the Father which He, in turn, wants only to transmit to our hearts and make of us the witnesses to this love for our brothers and sisters: and here lies the secret spring, the happiness which we are bound to produce in others in so doing. My heart was spellbound, my soul was filled with joy. My joy was even greater when, at mealtimes, I saw the Brothers serving one another with joy and purpose.

Once back with my family, I felt a need to return to the Adiopodoumé

community in order to get to know it better. So I phoned one of the contacts I had made during the festivities and who was it who picked up? Fr Laurent Bacho. After briefly introducing myself, Father Laurent asked me this question: what are you doing at present? I replied: Nothing Father. Fr Laurent continued saying "I am at the community, if you've got time you could call round to see me today". I went out to the Adiopodoumé community as fast as I could; it was a Saturday morning. Fr Laurent came out of the lounge and after greeting me told me that this was the day applicants wishing to join the community were being received, "they come on a Saturday and go back on the Sunday, after Mass." So he said, "go back home, tell your parents, pack your bag and get back here so you can meet them." At the Father's word I quickly returned home, told the family, grabbed a few belongings and rushed back to the community, without delay, without reservation and without looking back.

It was during these times that I discovered another of the Congregation's treasures: the founding texts. I could feel the desire to learn more about the Congregation, its charism, life of prayer and communal brotherhood. And so in 2014, after some time as an applicant, I was admitted into the Community of Adiopodoumé as a pre-postulant. I was welcomed by Fr Sylvain and all the Brothers to experience fraternal community life for a year in the formation house at Adiopodoumé.

After a wonderful year of community life, I asked to enter the Congregation as a postulant, so great was my desire to continue this story of fraternal life, in the steps of Jesus Christ and of St Michael Garicoits. The answer was positive.

Thus in 2015, I started my experience as a postulant with lessons in philosophy in the Senior Seminary. I learned how to keep a sensible balance between my life of prayer and study, and my pastoral life. After my two years as a postulant (2015-2017), my thirst for knowledge of the rudiments of Betharramite religious life, to discover the texts of the Congregation in more depth was even greater, pushing me in ever deeper, yes, ever deeper. So it was that, in all freedom, I asked to be taken into the novitiate. Before I got the answer however, I was sent as a pastoral support worker to the Akwaba Centre, Akwaba means "Safe Arrival" in the local language. The Centre works to support rehabilitation of children who are at odds with the law, or who have been abandoned or maltreated by their family thereby ending up on the street. Merely paying them a little attention, giving them a smile, some help with revision or homework, or just being there are but simple gestures which bring these children much joy and happiness.

After spending three months at the



Centre, I got a positive reply from the Congregation brought to me by Fr Jacky: I was admitted into the Novitiate in the Holy Land. The Lord worked wonders for me, Holy is His Name!

From Agboville (land of my birth) to the Holy Land (land of Jesus' birth and of the Bible), there I was, on 17 December 2017, in the Novitiate in Bethlehem, with my brother Jean-Claude and our novice master, Fr Jean-Paul Kissi. I walked on the land on which walked Our Lord; I touched with my own hands the place of His birth in Bethlehem, the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem; I went up to Calvary, touched and contemplated the Wood of the Cross. Fr Felet allowed us to participate, from the inside, in the great feasts of the Catholic Church; the Great Night of Christmas at the Basilica of the Nativity and the Great and Holy Easter Vigil in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, among others. Henceforth, my approach to the Bible took on new meaning.

With Fr Jean-Paul I learned in depth the basics of Betharramite religious

life and what was meant by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I soaked up the writings and texts of the Congregation, meditated on the Rule of Life and forged for myself the character of a Betharramite religious, through meditation, silence, worship, spiritual guidance, a life of personal and community prayer and Ignatian retreat.

When my canonical novitiate ended in December 2018, I thought I was going to be sent home to Africa to complete my apostolic novitiate; but Fr Jean-Paul told me "you will be going to Betharram, in France, for the apostolic novitiate". To which I responded "Here I am".

So I moved from the Holy Land, to another holy place, the holy land of Betharram, the place where it all started, the Mother House, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Betharram. In Betharram, with Fr Laurent, I was schooled in how to live the everyday reality of the demands of religious life, learned during my canonical novitiate, in terms of combining respect for the life of personal and community prayer, with carrying out one's daily activities, being present in the Sanctuary, and welcoming groups and pilgrims.

It was in 2019, in the course of my apostolic novitiate that I freely and joyfully asked to profess my first vows. The answer was positive. I returned home to the Ivory Coast on August 20, 2019 and on September 14, 2019, made my first profession of vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Now I am Brother Hyacinthe N'cho Akpa,

religious brother of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram: day of joy, happiness and gladness.

To proclaim God well, to make Him known and loved, one must oneself discover Him, learn how to better know Him and better love Him. I started studies in Theology in this dynamic in 2019. I immersed myself in the Sacred Sciences from 2019 to 2022, first at Abidjan's Catholic University, then at the Catholic Missionary Institute where in 2022 I gained a Baccalaureate in Theology.

After studying Theology, I am now embarking on a year of preparation for perpetual profession in Tshanfeto. Tshanfeto means "Arise!" in the local language, and is a social charity project run by the Congregation in Abidjan. It is an Agro-biological Training Centre which aims to support young people (boys and girls) to find their place in society by offering training in agriculture and animal husbandry. I have been in charge of pedagogical formation and leadership of life at the Centre since 2022; Fr Christian is my guide and mentor in this mission. It was while engaged in this mission for the Congregation that, again in all freedom and joy, I asked to be allowed to make my perpetual vows. And so, by the grace of God, at the General Council held on 31 March 2023, Fr Eduardo Gustavo Agin, Superior General of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram admitted me to Final Profession, with the consent of his council. This good news was given me

by Fr Jean-Luc Morin: Thank you Father for all these years in the service of your brothers; Always Forward!

On Saturday 16 September 2023 at 10 am, in the Parish of Saint Bernard of Adiopodoumé, I made the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, for ever, into the hands of Fr Jean-Dominique Delgue, Vicar General of

Br. Jean-Claude Djiraud scj:

Ever since the day following my full commitment to our religious family of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bétharram, my joy remains great as I know myself to be a fully-fledged member of our family as I write this article. Indeed, on 1st October 2023, at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Betharram, under the guidance of

Father Jean Dominique Delgue, the Vicar General, I professed the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience for life. For me, perpetual profession does not signify the culmination of a lived journey, but rather a moment to live and to intensify the quality of my choice of the religious life as a Betharramite in imitation of the crushed and obedient Christ.

I am Jean-Claude DJIRAUD, born on 16th October 1983, in Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast. In the congregation, I belong to the Saint Michael Garicoïts

the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram. And now I am a "perpetual religious brother" of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram and I am very happy. Pray for me that I remain faithful. Always Forward, without delay, without reservation, without looking back, by love. ■



region, currently on a mission in the Vicariate of France/Spain, serving in the community of Pau (St. Michael House, formerly Carmel). I am the youngest of six siblings, consisting of four boys and two girls. I recall that as a young boy, I was the only child in my family who attended Sunday celebrations. In 1993, following my father's death, I went to live with my uncle, my adoptive father, who cared for me until the Lord called him to Himself on 17th April last year.

In my new family, I grew up in

a Christian environment, as my mother is a committed Catholic and my father followed the Harrist faith (a traditional African religion). My mother took responsibility for our religious education. In my biological family, I was the only one who attended Sunday celebrations, but now, in my new family, Sunday and feast day celebrations held paramount importance. Thus, I began my Christian initiation to receive the sacrament of Baptism on 7th June 1997, and the sacrament of Confirmation the following year, on 31st May 1998.

Regarding my vocation, as a young boy in my biological family, I often had questions about the role of a priest and the desire to become one came to mind. In my final year at Anyama Modern High School, located adjacent to the Sacred Heart of Mary Theological Seminary, the desire to become a priest was rekindled as I watched the seminarians in cassocks walking meditatively in the seminary. However, I had to leave the city after failing to pass the baccalaureate exam to join my family in Yopougon. I obtained my scientific baccalaureate the following year and was enrolled in a Physics-Chemistry programme at Felix Houphouët Boigny University in Cocody, Abidjan.

The desire to become a priest became clearer, and I decided to discuss it with a priest from my parish in discernment together. During this

time, I was involved in the catechesis commission of the parish, and as part of its activities, we organized a retreat at St. Bernard Parish in Adiopodoumé, a parish managed by the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Bétharram. This was my first encounter with the Bétharram fathers. While in contact with my spiritual director, I continued to discern, and in the end, I felt drawn to religious life.

On 27th July 2014, my spiritual director came to celebrate the final profession of Jean-Paul Kissi scj and Vincent Worou Dimon scj on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Saint Michel Garicoïts' birth into heaven. He informed me about an upcoming vocational camp for aspirants and young people seeking a sense of vocation. I decided to visit the community to gather information, and there, I met a brother who encouraged me to participate in the camp. This marked my second encounter with the Betharram fathers. Since this camp was called a "*flying camp*," we spent the first few days in the community before flying to the second site.

Even during these initial days in the community, I was struck by the simplicity and joy of the brothers and fathers. Observing how the sons of Saint Michel Garicoïts lived, I could sense that they were eager to, "*bring the same happiness to others*," and this already had a positive impact on me. After the camp, I was

offered the opportunity to start a formation experience. I began my journey into Betharramite religious life on 5th October 2014, with the pre-postulancy stage, followed by two years of postulancy, which included philosophical studies. After that came the novitiate, with the canonical novitiate in Bethlehem from December 2017 to December 2018 and the apostolic novitiate in the Central African Republic in the new community of Bimbo from December 2018 to August 2019. I professed my first vows on 14th September 2019.

After completing the first cycle of theology, which I began at the Catholic University of West Africa and finished at the Catholic Missionary Institute of Abidjan, I spent a year at the community in Pau as part of my preparation for perpetual vows, which I professed on 1st October 2023, at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Betharram.

Looking back on my journey, I recognize the immense richness of the congregation through its charism and spirituality. It is a spirituality of Love: the disarming love of Christ, sent by the Father under the guidance of the Spirit, who assumed our human condition for our redemption. Throughout my formation, I allowed myself to be touched and continue to be shaped by the primacy of love, which also calls me to love, and in the footsteps of our father, Saint Michael, to say in my turn, *'Here I am without delay, without reserve,*

without looking back, for love rather than for any other reason.'

I cannot overlook the virtues of the Sacred Heart: charity, humility, obedience, dedication, discretion, and perfection, which serve as spiritual signposts for me to meditate on and cultivate, guiding me to live the ideal of the Betharramite religious life. Another aspect of this spirituality that has also resonated with me is the self-sacrifice of Christ. To look at our Lord Jesus Christ, who sets the example and to annihilate ourselves is what we are called to do. This self-annihilation allows me to let go of my ego. I continue to draw from the spirituality of the mystique of the Incarnation and the annihilation of the Son of God, as advocated and lived by our founding father, to become a bearer of Christ and bring the same happiness to others in our suffering world.

Aware of my human frailties, I entrust myself to the maternal care of Mary, our Lady of Betharram, to the intercession of our father, Saint Michael, and to all the Betharramites in heaven and on earth, so that I may remain faithful to my commitment. Forward Always. ■



Community in mission

minister-mission-religious life



The ministry (mission) accomplished by religious and diocesans: differences and practical applications.

| Fr. Tobia Sosio scj

« For this year's World Mission Sunday, I have chosen a theme inspired by the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 24:13-35): "Hearts on fire, feet on the move". Those two disciples were confused and dismayed, but their encounter with Christ in the word and in the breaking of the bread sparked in them the enthusiastic desire to set out again towards Jerusalem and proclaim that the Lord had truly risen. In the Gospel account, we perceive this change in the disciples through a few revealing images: their hearts burned within them as they heard the Scriptures explained by Jesus, their eyes were opened as they recognized him and, ultimately, their feet set out on the way. By meditating on these three images, which reflect the journey of all missionary disciples, we can



renew our zeal for evangelization in today's world." (Pope Francis, MESSAGE FOR the 97th WORLD MISSION DAY 2023)

It is always good to reflect and discern how to harmonise each of the three dimensions that the theme of this month's NEF refers to: ministry – mission – religious life.

Father Gustavo, in the message for the General Chapter, has a very strong turn of phrase: "Either we are a community in mission or we are not religious life."

It often happens that to save the mission, we reduce the community to a minimum or, under the guise of community life, we prefer to stay quietly at home, without worrying too much about what is happening outside. We

must also face the risk of being a religious with diocesan characteristics (several religious have recently renounced religious (community) life, to become incardinated in a diocese).

It is certain that the more we know Jesus, the more we learn from Him the missionary spirit, the joy of communicating the Good News, his compassion for those who suffer, for those who live on the margins, for those who suffer from hunger, not only who are hungry for bread, but above all for truth. It would not be a religious vocation to renounce the mission. *"Hearts on fire, feet on the move"*: the expression applies to every disciple of Jesus, but even more so to us who want to follow him as closely as possible and even more so to us other Betharramites whose missionary charism is that of *Ecce Venio*.

"Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!", as Pope Francis would say (*Evangelii Gaudium* 109). But there is also the commitment to the community, with its demands in terms of schedules, obedience, superiors, transfers, etc. This can be an obstacle when we want to seriously assume a missionary responsibility, in response to the demands of the world around us, challenging us with increasing force. There are also the demands made by the dioceses, which are moving more and more towards a pastoral ministry which all are called to, and to which the religious are called to collaborate with docility and a community spirit.

More than once, I have heard bishops complain about Congregations who transfer religious while neglecting their diocesan commitments.

It would perhaps be appropriate to clearly establish the difference between mission and ministry: we are all called to live out the missionary spirit, by following Jesus, our brother, who since baptism, has been calling us to look on life as a gift. We can easily fall into the sin of living comfortably, all expenses paid, without worrying about anything or anyone.

The term "ministry" refers to a task, a responsibility that has been entrusted to us by someone (Congregation, Bishop, Community). It is then our duty to each account for what we do, and how we do it. We can thus avoid falling into the error of individualism, of the search for personal satisfaction.

Always more 'we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a "mystique" of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage.' (EG 87) *"Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community!"* (EG 92) We can and we must surely save the mission and religious life, mission - community (it is an inseparable pair, not only for us religious, but also for Jesus).

The demands of the ministry sometimes require us to be absent from the community for a while, but the fraternal-communal-religious

spirit invites us to find the time to come together in community, to pray together, to develop the community-apostolic project in order to communicate and share the fruits

and joys of our mission: fervent hearts, open eyes, feet on the move... On mission, in the spirit and charism of the Betharramite religious. ■



Called and sent: Answer “Here I am!” where the Lord asks us

| Fr. Sergio Gouarnalusse scj

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit” (John 12:23-24)

Life is a calling, a gift given by God, not to keep, but to offer to God and to brothers in love, it is a vocation, it is a gift and a task.

Also as Christians, through baptism, we are all called to be disciples “Come and see” to be with Jesus, to follow him and we are sent to be missionaries “Go and proclaim.” John Paul II said in *Redemptoris Missio* “faith is strengthened by giving it away” (R.M.2). We are all called to have a missionary attitude, we are also all called to have a missionary concern so that the message of Jesus and the Kingdom of God reaches everyone. The Good News we have is to be shared.

As Betharramites, from the contemplation of the Son who says to the Father, Here I Am, our spirituality is eminently missionary since it calls

us to follow the same impulse of the Word for the salvation of men and to manifest to all men the mercy of the Father.

But not all of us are called to go to different cultures and peoples. In this month of October, the month of missions, we have the model of Saint Therese who, feeling a strong missionary concern, nevertheless discovers that God calls her to be a missionary from the convent. Like the Heart in the body, she will be the one who promotes that missionary love of the Church from the convent.

It is worth noting the need to take these three points into account when sending a missionary:

- **Discernment of vocation:**

That is why one of the first things to keep in mind is that the call to be a missionary in other places in the world, in other peoples and cultures

is not for everyone. We are people with gifts, personal characteristics, stories, all of which is a gift. The Spirit acts, but it assumes nature. Not everyone has the gifts to adapt to new cultures and realities. Therefore, going as a missionary to other places first of all requires serious discernment before the Lord to confirm that call.

In several Churches, for the sending of missionaries today, a time of serious discernment prior to sending them is proposed, with accompaniment.

On the other hand, a missionary is an envoy, it is the Church that sends, the community of origin must confirm that call and send it.

• The incarnation

Now, the impulse of "Here I Am" also shows us the value that the Incarnation has for us. For every missionary it is very important to know that he is sent to a different culture, people and church, this requires enormous openness, cultivating the attitude of listening and encounter. Knowing how to recognize one's own cultural prejudices, to free oneself from them and knowing how to recognize the seeds of the Kingdom present in the place where one is sent. This requires from the missionary a deep faith that the Spirit works in the hearts of men



and people.

In order to achieve this, knowledge of the language and a good adaptation time knowing the culture and customs of the people is important. Also know the characteristics and projects of the local Church.

Some missionary congregations, when they see a candidate with this vocation, choose to send them to study theology in the mission country. It should be noted that there are strong differences in theological formation in the Church today, which responds to cultural differences and the ecclesial moment of the particular Church. That is why a theological-pastoral adaptation is necessary in the place of mission.

For a Betharramite, this predisposition to the Incarnation is in turn something typical of the charism.

• The Community that welcomes

At the same time, it is necessary

to predispose the receiving community to welcome cultural differences, to know how to appreciate the novelty that the missionary brother shares, and to have the patience to accompany him in the adaptation.

Therefore, the missionary vocation demands, like the grain of wheat,

knowing how to die to ways of seeing, of living, to offer myself from the gifts that God gave me and the faith to a new people that has other values that will enrich me and that I can enrich by giving myself, from docility to the Holy Spirit, to collaborate in the building of the Kingdom. ■



Could we become “missionaries” through the mass media? And what conditions should we observe?

| Fr. Daniel González scj

These two questions are very important for me and could very well be answered by some digital evangelizers, who are true missionaries on the networks.

The figure of Paul comes to mind, with his passion and missionary creativity, who headed decisively towards the Areopagus to announce the Gospel, without any hesitation... Yes, he went to that pagan place, where people listened for the news that circulated in the world... It occurs to me that with the passing of the centuries and the strengthening of the Church, we have become accustomed to talking about God in “Catholic” environments, parishes, schools, universities, social works of the church... while considering it inappropriate to move in “pagan” envi-

ronment. Did we become disincarnate? If so this is fast changing. We are forced into crisis mode, we can be afraid or, on the contrary, we can seize the opportunity to reincarnate in the world...

The General Chapter of Chiang Mai 2023 expresses itself and encourages us (in n.16) to “promote new ways of making our charism known through modern media”; and in n.141e it tells us that, *“To promote listening and creativity, in a complex society, the Chapter calls: to continue and deepen evangelization of the media and through the media”* (Pope Francis, International meeting of Digital Evangelizers, Monterrey-Mexico).

For my part, I don’t think I am a digital missionary, but I’ll tell you how I got to the networks...

At the end of July 2017 I was ap-

pointed Regional Superior of the Etchecopar Region, which includes the communities and missionary works of Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina. This service has meant a "change of life" for me, which has implied being in constant movement, from community to community, seeking to accompany and encourage the life and mission of my brothers; and on the other hand, limiting the pastoral services I had been developing.

This combination of constant pilgrimage and my desire to share what God has done in me and "achieve the same happiness for others" brought me closer to the networks, discovering in them a place that allowed me to accompany processes beyond the physical place in which I found myself. In this way I landed on Facebook, creating the page "I want to discern", with the intention of generating a space in which discernment is "spoken and shared", and reaching those wishing to follow a path of discernment or Spiritual Exercises, whether "online" or in person.

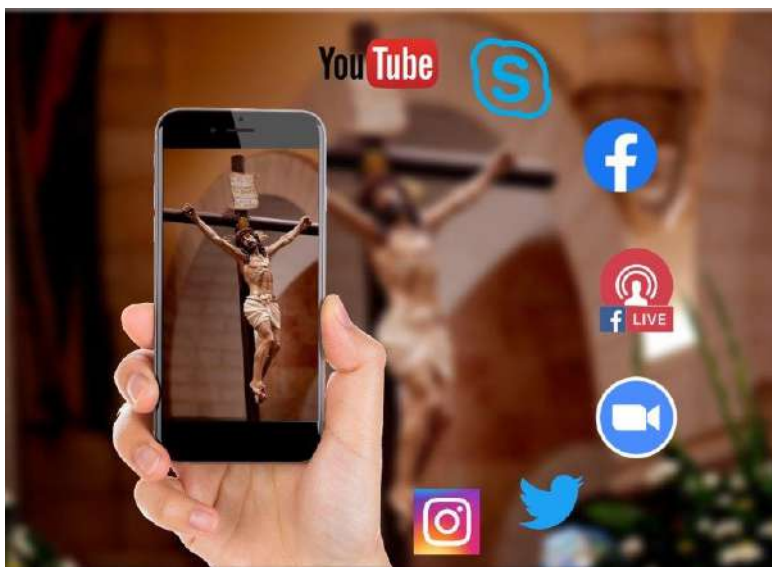
In 2019 the world began to experience the Covid '19 Pandemic. At the beginning of 2020, a quarantine was decreed in Argentina, which would be very rigorous and "ongoing". The borders were closed. This reality, together with the delicate health situation that my father was going through, prevented me from traveling to visit the communities. This new framework of reality "forced" me to continue my regional service through the media (e.g. WhatsApp & Zoom). And on the other hand, at the

suggestion of a young woman I began to venture into Instagram and also into Tik Tok, with @quierodiscernir. (=I want to discern).

These platforms made it possible for me, in a particular way, to live my vocation, to feel useful, to put to service what I have received as a gift. Specifically, through these networks, and together with some lay people and several young religious people in the region, we generate spaces in "online" and also "in-person" mode for: Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and Spiritual Retreats; Workshops on Prayer, Meditation with the Word and Discernment based on the Method of Saint Michael; Spiritual Accompaniment and Vocational Spaces; Betharramite spirituality and knowledge of the Congregation...

Of course, as Pope Francis tells us in *Christus Vivit* no.88: "...every human reality is marked by limits and shortcomings. It is not wise to confuse communication with mere virtual contact. In fact, the digital environment is also a territory of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence... Digital media can expose people to the risk of dependency, isolation and progressive loss of contact with concrete reality, hindering the development of authentic interpersonal relationships. ... The web is also a channel for the dissemination of pornography and the exploitation of people for sexual purposes or through gambling." Francisco continues telling us in CV no.90: 'Digital spaces blind us to the vulnerability of others and hinder personal reflection. Problems such

as pornography distort the young person's perception of human sexuality. Technology used in this way creates an illusory parallel reality that ignores human dignity. Immersion in the virtual world has



led to a kind of "digital migration", that is, a distancing from family, cultural and religious values, which leads many people to a world of loneliness and self-invention, until they experience a lack of roots, even if they remain physically in the same place.'

These are very concrete and real risks and temptations, to which we are all exposed when we enter and navigate this virtual reality. Hence I understood why young people, religious people, and those not so young, can spend so much time in front of a screen.

Without a doubt, the way forward is not to deny the existence of this virtual world, nor to carry out a crusade demonizing the networks, nor to prevent access to them; because, as Pope Francis also tells us in CV no.87: "The web and social networks have created a new way of communicating and connecting, and they are a place where young people spend a lot of time and find each other easily... They constitute an extraordinary opportunity of dialogue, encounter and exchange between people,

as well as access to information and knowledge... capable of effectively protecting the most vulnerable people by highlighting violations of their rights. In many countries, the web and social

networks represent an essential place to reach young people and involve them, including them in pastoral initiatives and activities."

Of course, we should not relate to them either, in a naive or self-sufficient way, ignoring their dangers.

Taking into account all of the above, I think it is essential to clarify oneself and answer: why and how do I interact on the networks? What am I looking for in them? How much time do I dedicate to them? Am I free, can I leave them when I see fit? Are they generating in me some habit, some need? What and how do they make me feel? How do I feel after interacting with them? What is my relationship with my present, with my environment, with the real people I live with? Do they violate or contradict some value that I have professed..... that I want to live by, that humanises me?

Being attentive to the answers I give to these questions, I find that contemplative prayer, meditation on the Word, personal perception and daily

life have helped me to notice when the networks are “ensnaring” me, without wasting time asking myself: what I’m living? how am I feeling? what’s happening to me? Likewise, the networks are a thermometer of my consecrated life and they provide me with a good service.

Finally, I think it is essential that each person be clear about the meaning and motivation in using the networks. For my part, it was discovering networks as an area to reach, first of all, young people and: a) sow in them the Gospel and the importance of discernment to discover the value of one’s own life; b) generate an “online” meeting space, but with the desire and intention that, at some point, a personal and in-person meeting will be provoked; c) accompany their personal processes of

encounter with God, with themselves, with their vocation or, at least, be a motivator for them to begin them with others.

Deep down, the first motivation is “to achieve the same happiness for others”; with the conviction that the best service I can provide is to “generate excuses” for the encounter of the Creator with the Creature, because this certainty encourages me: if God melted in charity meets the heart of the young man... then the adventure begins! The adventure of... ‘How much you have loved me, my God... Here I am!’

Personally I can say that, within the limits of my position, a situation imposed on me, as I have stated, the networks helped me, in their own way, to display a love that has no limits... ■



Experience of a community in mission

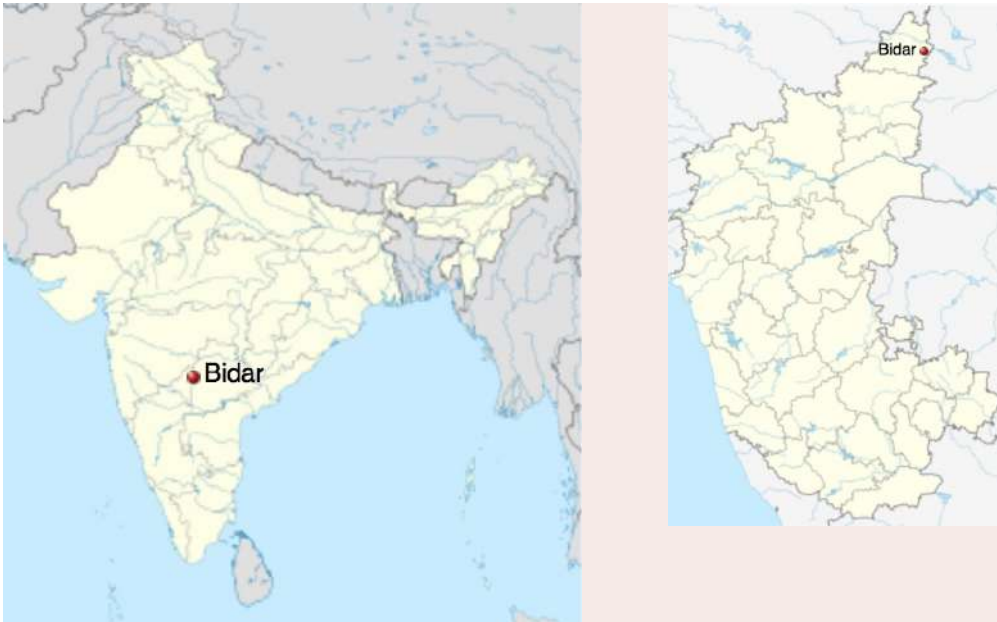
| Our brethren in Bidar (India)

“BIDAR” a Beautiful Mission for the Lord, a venture for the one who dares. Here are we Betharramites!

Historical and geographical Background: “Though India became independent in 1947, Bidar was liberated only in 1949.” Accord-

ing to early history, Nizam [ruler] of Hyderabad occupied this area, keeping it apart from joining Indian union and was liberated in 1949. “Hyderabad Karnataka Liberation Day is celebrated on 17th September every year.”

Bidar district lies at the extreme



Bidar is located about 700 km from Bangalore, both towns belong to the State of Karnataka (India)

north of Karnataka. In education, it stands last in the state. The people speak a very strange language called Bidar Kannada- The people of Bidar are identified by this mixed language.

Bidar has a Methodist Christian background through the efforts of Christian missionaries from America. "As the missionaries left, their church also declined." Catholic church was born here in 1982, with the coming of Rev Fr. Robert Michael Miranda from Mangalore diocese as Episcopal vicar. Gulbarga Diocese was created in 2005, Aug 18th. Fr. Robert became its first Bishop, and remains in that position to this day.

Though many are baptized into catholic faith, they still live in Methodist background. Our pastoral team consists of two Betharam Fathers and four SMMI Sisters.

Though two different communities, we make one community for the mission. Our centre which includes 8 villages, within the radius of 5-6 k.m. takes care of their spiritual needs. Attendance at mass is very poor. If it rains, no holy mass; no electricity, no mass; any function in the vil-

lage, no mass. On these occasions, people simply do not come to church. Apparently it looks that the holy mass is the need of the pastoral team.

'Build catholic faith and make it strong' is our mission here.

The Bishop of Gulbarga approached our Congregation in 2007. Rev Fr. Britto Rajan came here as the first missionary. After completing his term, at his return, came the challenging question "whom shall I send?" without a positive answer, Bidar mission was at the verge of closure. Rev Fr. Satish scj, faithful to our charism, answered: "Yes! Where no one goes, I dare to go". In 2016 Fr. Satish came here as assistant to the director Fr. Victor, a diocesan priest. The following year Fr. Victor was transferred. Fr. Satish



became the director. Since 2017 the Betharrmites take care of the center.

“Blessed are the feet of the people who brings good tidings”. (Is 52:7)

Fr. Jude scj joined the community of Betharram. We have in every village, once a week holy mass. The team reaches the place one hour in advance, by vehicle, given by the diocese. We prepare for mass, practice readings of the mass, teach catechism, bhajan singing etc. Bhajan is a famous Methodist custom. As the people are illiterate, participation in the mass is very poor. Most of them do not understand the difference between Holy Eucharist and blessed bread [Methodist communion]. Village services are always in the evening. We leave the centre by 6.30pm and return at about

10.30pm, then have our supper and engage in other activities.

Many activities like Missionary Child Association [MCA], Basic Ecclesial Communities [BEC], Family visits, are regularly organised in each village. It is very sad that they do not give reverence to Mother Mary as the Mother of the Church. Rosary is used only as an ornament around the neck. During the month of October we go to each house and pray the Rosary with the family members.

Apart from these activities, the Diocese organizes many programmes. Every year during the holy week we conduct a residential “faith formation camp for the children. We prepare them with reminders and encouragements for about a month. As they have no conveyance we go to each village by our [SMMI] School bus and

bring them to the center. At our request our superiors [SCJ & SMMI] send brothers and sisters to assist us. We reach out to Parish Pastoral Council, Women, Youth, Couples, Children, etc. Retreats are conducted, along with many awareness programmes for youth and unemployed individuals. To encourage education, scholarships and sponsorships are provided. The parents have no means of giving their children good education. It is due to lack of finance and ignorance about the values of education. Their only source of income is rain crops. If no

rain, crops fail, too much rain, crops fail.

Betharramites have received a special calling to work in this diocese. After Fr Britto, Fr. Sathish 3 years, Fr. Jude 2 years Fr. Livin 4 years, Fr. George is the present Director of the centre along with Fr. Avinash. Seeing our pastoral service here, Bishop is happy and requesting us to establish our own Center and activities. SMMI Sisters have opened a school where catholic children can receive good education. ■



We are not tied to any particular work

| Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

In this NEF dedicated to the "Community in Mission" I would like to begin by mentioning two interesting quotes from the *Spiritual Doctrine* that both contain the well-known expression: "Camp volant" (mobile camp):

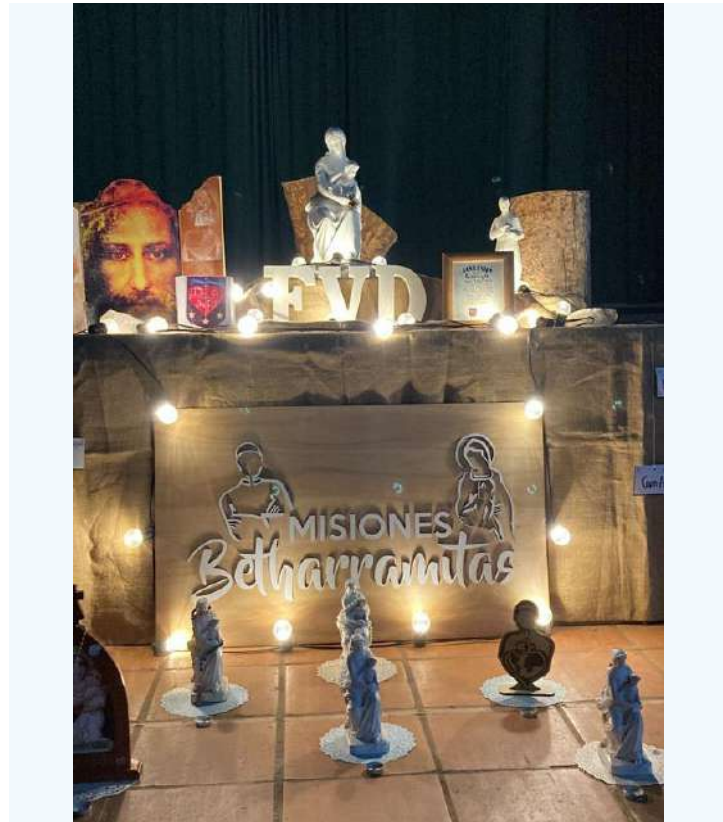
(DS § 234) Let us be ready to fly wherever obedience calls us. We must be a mobile camp, auxiliary priests, uncommitted to any particular work, ready to move anywhere at the bishop's request.

(DS § 6) Such priests would make a true mobile camp of specialised soldiers, ready to go at the first sign from their commanders wherever they were sent, even and above all, to those most difficult ministries that others do not want.

Let's look at those words of movement that are in the two quotes: 'Mobile camp, willing to fly, willing to be taken ..., willing to run...especially to the most difficult ministries and the ones that others do not want.

This is precisely how Saint Michael Garicoits wanted his missionaries to be: *"Give me a heart that truly loves. Such a heart believes, tastes the things of God; it runs; it flies in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is love that leads men. Love is the secret spring to be discovered in postulants and novices. Love is the divine germ which we must develop in souls... If it is missing, there is nothing we can do"* (DS § 101). Here we find the same words and images of movement that we saw before (run, fly, love that drives, spring) and in a context of following Christ. This tells us that the Betharramite missionary disciple has to have the same dynamic dispositions as the Teacher and Missionary Jesus.

On the other hand, we can see that it is not the postulants and novices who already have this dynamism



of love, but rather the religious who are already professed, because it was discovered and developed in them, when they were postulants, novices or scholastics.... these dynamic characteristics of the charism, that is: the passion for Christ and his mission.

It is interesting to note that the Gospels present Jesus as an itinerant prophet, who travels with his disciples through the hamlets, towns, villages, cities and who has nowhere to lay his head. Saint Michael Garicoits has captured this itinerancy of Jesus in the Gospel. Some examples: *"When he entered the world, he began his career... Here I am! I come to do your will, my God"; "The divine child traces the way for us. He springs forth: He runs: He moves always forward..."* (DS § 96).

Jesus, like the sun, rises every morning, like a husband outside his tent, he sets out like a joyful conqueror (cf. Ps 18; DS § 5). *"What a leap! From the Father's bosom to Mary's and from her to a manger!"* (DS § 5). *"To reach that spiritual union, we must exercise ourselves in*

picturing before us the divine suffering Jesus, whether nailed to the Cross, or travelling through Judea.” (Correspondence, Vol.I, letter 111)

In this way we discover the coherence of the doctrine of following Christ of Saint Michael Garicoits: the Betharramite missionary disciple has the same missionary style as Jesus *“believe, savour the things of God, run, fly in the steps of Our Lord Jesus Christ...”* (DS § 101). The Betharramite missionary must have the same ease in carrying out his mission as his missionary Master. No obstacle can stop him in his momentum. This impulse is what characterises the Jesus of the Rule of Life: the impulse of the Heart of Jesus, the incarnate Word (2, 4a, 13,). This impulse is expressed in the *Ecce venio*, which extends from the virginal Conception, throughout all the events of his life, until death on the Cross.

“Oh, if only our being, body and soul had but one movement, a gen-

erous impulse to place itself under the guidance of the Spirit of love, saying without ceasing: Here I am, ecce venio!” (DS § 129)

The ease of Jesus and that of the Betharramite missionaries, and their freedom to respond unconditionally to the mission entrusted to them is the clear expression of the obedience of both. There is nothing of their own that generates their missionary drive; their missionary impulse has no motivation other than in the Father and in their passion for Christ and his mission...

I think that all the previous reflection is part of the charismatic experience of Saint Michael Garicoits in the way of carrying out mission, because he fought with great energy the attempts to tie us to particular works. We can see this through the accompaniment that he gave to the first religious who went to Argentina, so that they acted according to charismatic intuition:

1° In 1858 Saint Michael considered that it was not yet time to organize a mission among the Indians of the area.

“I have already said that the request for a mission to the Indians seems at the present time out of place” (Correspondence, Vol.I, letter 163)

2° He opposed them obtaining the Title of Apostolic Missionaries:

“The idea of the title Apostolic Missionary has been opposed by me very strongly since your departure from Betharram.

'What purpose would it serve?' I asked Fr X. 'It is not right to bypass the Bishops here and over there.' I see no reason to change my opinion over this. It is really unjustifiable! What do you want? When one's ideas are blocked, it is difficult to accept it. Then one believes that one is losing time when things are not going according to the inventions of our own imaginings. One does not know how to understand, appreciate, and embrace the disposition; corde magno et animo volenti et constanti: obscurity, sterility and lack of success is what one sees oneself reduced to, by obedience. This is the manna unfortunately hidden from so many.

It is necessary to take men as they are, and to try and bring out everything possible, while knowing how best to make a sacrifice. Moreover, it is necessary to limit one's objectives in this world. Let us support each other and the Lord will support us. » (Correspondence Vol.I, letter 163)

That these kinds of requests should be made to me and that a collective request is made by ordinary members cannot seem very much out of place; but once again, have patience. Why not limit yourselves to practicing the immensity of charity within the limits of your position? (Correspondence, Vol.I, letter 163)

3° He opposed the establishment of a community in Montevideo because it lacked a superior and it was not the time. Sense of discretion and discernment.

"I cannot for the time being give directives about Montevideo. You will find out later when the position and the designs of Providence will appear more clearly. I would want you with all my heart to go the aid of our countrymen in Montevideo, but the time has not yet come. We require good Basque missionaries and a good Superior in this residence. Fr Sarraute could not do worse than write to Monsignor in Bayonne for that, or to me, instead of writing to the Bishop of Buenos Aires, whom I admire and like more and more." (Correspondence, Vol.I, letter 163)

4° However, he did support the opening of the San José College, as had been planned from Betharram, despite the opposition of some, such as Father Larrouy, to whom St Michael writes in these terms:

"What is done in Buenos Aires is done with the knowledge of the two Bishops of Buenos Aires and of Bayonne and of the Superior of Betharram. The object of this work is as follows; you have been lent to the Bishop of Buenos Aires for missions to the Basques and the Bearnais people. But the work of the College is not foreign to this missionary work.

It is quite right for you to express your doubts; but going beyond that is to break to rule." (Correspondence, Vol.I, letter 157)

5° Saint Michael Garicoits also opposed them having their own church in Buenos Aires, as they wanted:

"There is no doubt that it would be very nice to have your own Church, but how could it be done in such a big town where there are already so many churches? I think that the few difficulties or problems that arise because of the present situation should matter little to apostles; besides it strikes me that this situation is better for auxiliaries, whereas the other idea of building seems to me quite out of the question. Before doing anything else, continue to do as much good as possible wherever you might be. The field appears vast enough and promising enough to attract God's blessings." (Correspondence, Vol. II, letter 184)

6° Starting in September 1862, the Bishop of Buenos Aires appointed them chaplains to the Poor Clares and to the apostolate in the church of San Juan Bautista, which is that of the monastery. Here they will develop a great ministry among Basques and Bearnese, but at the same time they feel limited by the presence of the Poor Clares. That is why the missionaries will continue to claim their own church in Buenos Aires, just as the teachers have the San José school (Correspondence, Vol.II, letter 184, note 2).

7° The problem of the church of our own in Buenos Aires is going to continue over time. With many complications between the parties: Father Sardoy, Father Magendie, his Council, the Bishop and a commission of lay people who are the promoters and exert great pressure on Father Sardoy.

LETTER FROM FATHER MAGENDIE TO FATHER ETCHE-

COPAR, COLEGIO SAN JOSÉ, FEBRUARY 28, 1874 |
"I think the time has come to tell you about the continuation of my negotiations and our resolutions, as far as the church of San Carlos is concerned, I mean the semi-Basque church of Father Sardoy. The two Basques, Martín Amespill, President and Martín Stevarena, treasurer, who are part of the commission of this church, made, as you already know, the first contacts with Father Sardoy. Due to illness, I was in Montevideo at that time, and without waiting for my return, Mr. Sardoy wrote to you on the subject, and we, for our part, waited for his response. He arrived right away, and naturally sent the matter to the Council of America. Father Sardoy also received one of your letters by the same ship, in which you announced, according to what he says, that Mr. Magendie had to speak out. As he was pressured and annoyed by the two gentlemen of the commission, he showed up one afternoon at the school, and in the loudest and most demanding tone, he proved to me in his own way that I was the one who had to decide that matter and that I had to respond. In the act and also in the sense that he himself indicated. I tried to make him understand that the matter was serious and that the Council's intervention was needed. I added that it was prudent to clarify the matter a little instead of blindly abandoning oneself in the hands of those Gentlemen."

As we can see, Saint Michael Garicoits firmly practices and invites us to practice permanent discernment: stripped of any particular work. This is what our Rule of Life even says when it states that our mission thus received is the concern of everyone in the community (Nr. 16) and it is completed like this later: *"The community [...] is composed of at least three religious, who receive from the Regional Superior in accordance with the local Bishop, a common*

mission, even if their activities may be diverse." (N° 98)

Hence, *"being stripped of any particular work"* (cf. texts cited from the DS) is an essential condition for a Betharramite, since particular works are an obstacle to living that mobile camp, dreamed of by Saint Michael Garicoits and accepted and proclaimed by us as a style of following Christ, for life. ■



"The aim of our Society is not so much to preach, hear confessions or teach, etc., as to form men well disposed to perform these ministries worthily when the bishop or leader of the Society asks them. The object of the Society is then to train and form these ministers so perfectly that at the first signal of the will of their bishop or superior they can be worthily chosen to work for the salvation of souls."

(MS 339 - RL. 15)



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