



Happy Christmas to you all!

F.V.D.

F.V.D. Betharram, December 23, 1884

Dearest Sister,

In Rome, we offer each other New Year's wishes at Christmas; and surely this is quite right for Catholic hearts; where there can be no "New" **except through Him who renews everything**, no happiness, except with the Joy of the Angels, no security, except with the King of the ages! Let us go then, dear Sister, to the God of love, and there, receive my wishes and my New Year's gifts in the heart of his most Immaculate Mother. These gifts are none other than Jesus and Mary herself. They give themselves to us; they are all ours.

Oh! let us help each other to give ourselves to them. During the Mass, if it pleases God, I will give you these magnificent gifts, I will give you the Child clinging to his Mother's breast, **and together with the Shepherds and the Magi we will offer our poor hearts.**

Fr. Auguste Etchecopar,

letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of Charity

(Photo: Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez scj)



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Betharram

Nr. 209

NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE - 123RD YEAR, 11th series - 14 December 2024

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The word of the superior general

To govern is to serve ...to live in peace

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45)*

Dear Betharramites:

For some time now the Church has been proposing to us a reflection on leadership in times of synodality. Considering how fast things move in this present world, and its obstacles, it is not strange that an ancient institution like the church questions herself about the goal and the manner in which it leads and accompanies the People of God. We are all the People of God, and in this "People" each one has a fundamental place. We Betharramites call it "our position," and its meaning is similar to the *mission entrusted to us*: a theological journey, the journey of fidelity to the Will of God.

Governing by serving is key for exercising the service of authority. It sounds simple, but it isn't easy, because it requires progress in "the art of conducting (oneself)" that leads us to live in Peace, more precisely, to be leaders/artisans of Peace.

We have often erred in this sense, exercising power centred on ourselves, without earning the respect of those whom the Lord had entrusted to us. Likewise, those who should participate with religious obedience did not always do so, but rather allowed themselves to be caught up in gossip, or prevailing individualism, or defence of very personal works, or compulsive reaction to "urgent important matters"...

Our ecclesial body bears the scars of these historical errors, which can no longer be hidden. Every form of abuse in the Church is toxic and ends up being unmasked.

Authority is peaceful, it must be discerned in community, supported and respected. It cannot be born from a troubled spirit, from a root of resentment and a thirst for power. It is rather the fruit of the Spirit who leads us along the path of truth, justice and peace, to be signs of communion in the world. As religious, we are not immune to suffering the consequences of growing divisions in society. TV news spices up everyday life with evidence of humanity suffering various forms of violence. Some are external: like war, or self-obsession of nations, or inequalities of capitalist materialism, or climate change, or an opportunistic and ruthless geopolitics, or the abandonment of the weakest and poorest to their fate, or migrants without a destination or hope. Others are internal: the perversion of clericalism, the religious partisanship, community clashes, individualism and schismatic attitudes, etc. Jesus continues to suffer in the person of those who travel with their eyes fixed on a better horizon that seems never to arrive... We walk with this conviction: Jesus Christ is "our peace" (Eph 2.14)

It is from this wounded reality that we must live the service of authority with new perspectives. Understanding the word "neighbour" better, the Church proposes us to no longer seek prestige or power, and to learn to take on board the wounded and "half-dead" (Lk 10,30) foreign brother, to heal him and take him to "the Inn" where all ills are cured. The style that this Church of mercy proposes to us is a synodal style: walking together with the same sense, guided by the Spirit. But as we know, it is not enough to have synodal structures. We have to renew

nearly uninhabitable. It was close to eight o'clock in the evening, and we had to think about supper. But how? We had nothing to cook with. Fortunately, Brother Joannés had anticipated this critical moment. He produced from a basket some bread, cheese, jam, and a large bottle of red wine ("*üé boutella de piché*"). Thus we dined, seated or otherwise, amidst our furniture. Afterwards, we said evening prayers; and I recall that we hadn't forgotten to bring the little bell to ring the Angelus and say our devotions.

We went to bed, and the night passed without incident. But in the morning, we were able to see the deplorable and disgusting state of the house. It had served as a warehouse for sheep skins and had been handed over to us without being cleaned. All the rooms contained about 10 centimetres of dust mixed with scraps of wool and sheep bones. The courtyard was full of debris and mortar due to recent wall repairs. It was impossible to welcome anyone in such filthy conditions, so we had to begin with a thorough cleaning.

After morning Mass, we three founders set to work, aided by a fourth man named Don Vicente; a gentle and pious Spaniard, who aspired to join us and had planned to do so on March 19th, though he would not persevere for long. Nevertheless, the question of dinner arose. There was a kitchen, but it was in a sorry state; small and filthy, with

its door lying on the ground. Brother Joannés had nothing to cook with, so everything had to be bought. Around ten in the morning, Brother Joannés said to me, "*Let's go out and buy what we need for dinner; come with me, as I can't carry it all by myself.*" We had all been working since early morning, including the cook himself, so that day there was no soup for us. However, I still remember how delicious the grilled meat and rice pudding prepared by Brother Joannés tasted. It's true that my appetite helped. I was young, had worked hard, and had hardly eaten since the previous day.

Such was the inauguration of our future *San José* College: everything was small, modest, humble, and poor. Father Barbé hated attention, which is why he refused to announce the college's opening in the newspapers, to put up a sign above the entrance, or even give the college a name. He said, "*I don't want to be known through words, but through deeds; and if God wants us to have a college, He will send us students.*"



Along the way, he said to me, “*I would like a house somewhat removed from the city centre and close to a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, in memory of Our Lady of Bétharram.*” After an unsuccessful search lasting eight days, we were informed that a modest house opposite the church of Our Lady of Balvanera was available for rent. I accompanied Father Barbé to view it, and it appeared to meet our requirements. We rented it immediately for 600 piastres a month, with a piastre then worth about 25 French centimes.

Father Barbé was devoted to St. Joseph and wanted to inaugurate the college on his feast day, March 19th. The evening before, after night had fallen, Father Barbé, Brother Joannés, and your humble servant presented ourselves at the rented house. A cart carrying the bare essentials

for our move accompanied us. No prior arrangements had been made to ensure the house was ready and habitable. Upon arrival, we found the door locked and there was no key. Two helpful *gauchos*, loitering on the sidewalk during a political meeting, informed us that the key was with the gardener next door. They also assisted us in unloading the cart. However, we had no light and were forced to borrow a candle from the gardener – a candle made of tallow, still commonly used at the time. It was the candle of the poor.

Finally, the cart was unloaded, the street door closed, and the three founders of the college found themselves in one of the small rooms, where we had piled our few meagre pieces of furniture. The darkness prevented us from fully grasping the filthy state of the house, which was

them, by examining the way of exercising the service of authority with them. In fact, it is always necessary to be vigilant in order not to fall into forms of authoritarianism, even despotic ones, with abuses of conscience or spirituality that are the breeding ground for sexual abuse, in not respecting the most basic rights of the person. There is also the risk of exercising authority as a privilege, for those who hold it, or for those who uphold it as a form of complicity between factions, so that, *finally, each one does what he wants*, paradoxically promoting a kind of “anarchy” that would cause so much harm to the community.

Pope Francis told us (Superiors General) some time ago: *I hope that the service of authority is always exercised in a synodal style, respecting the proper law and the mediations that this provides, in order to avoid the imposition of authoritarianism, privileges or “laissez faire”. Promote a climate of listening and respect for the other, of dialogue, participation and sharing. Consecrated persons, with their witness, can contribute much to the Church in this process of synodality that we are experiencing. Since we are the first called to live it, to walk together, to listen to each other, to value the variety of gifts, to be welcoming communities* (Pope Francis’ speech to the USG - 26-11-22.)

We Betharramites cannot be content with locking ourselves in “my work” or “my ministry” to survive comfortably in a complicated world averse to faith. It takes courage to take on a proactive attitude in community that is nourished by a Mysticism of the Incarnation that is our own and becomes prophetic through the joyful witness of life. *This is a good governance: assuming our co-responsibility.*

We were judged *idoneus, expeditus, expositus* (suitable, willing and available) when we were presented to the Church. It is the ideal that St. Michael proposed with his whole life and for which he sacrificed his health and his blood. To be true apostles of Jesus’ heart is not an optional proposal... it is our essence.

I conclude by evoking our brothers gathered in Chiang Mai 2023, who touched on the theme of governance. Guided by the Spirit, they proposed dialogue and listening, but they also recalled some limits to which every religious is subject.

107. The General Chapter invites each religious to take seriously the vow of obedience (RL n. 60). We are sensitive to fraternal dialogue with legitimate authorities, but in the case of obstinate disobedience to the project of the Vicariate, the Regional Superior must intervene. If there is disobedience to the Regional Superior, he must, without



The Rebollo house, the first location of the San José College, opened on 19th March 1858. The house later became a café, deli, and grocery store until its demolition in 1928, as seen in this photo taken from Historia centenaria del Colegio San José (1858–1958) by B. Sarthou, S.C.J., Buenos Aires, 1960

hesitation, apply the Rule of Life n. 321, c. 111.

And they illuminated the path of discernment to shape the future of communities in mission:

108. The General Chapter recalls that questions relating to the discernment of our mission must be the fruit of dialogue with the authorities, in function of the “community in mission” and not conditioned simply by personal projects (RL n. 63).

Good work, and may God bless you:

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

QUESTIONS TO SHARE:

- 1) How can we Betharramites better assume our co-responsibility in the animation of our religious family?
- 2) Have you ever failed to obey, when it arose from dialogue and from what our Rule of Life establishes? Share your story.



Memories of Fr. Magendie (2): The foundation of the *San José* College in Buenos Aires

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

Letter from Fr. Magendie to Fr. Ernest Lullier,
12th July 1911

« *It must be said that the first idea for founding our San José College was born in Betharram.* When Father Barbé became the superior of the first American missionaries, the idea of completing our long-distance mission with the establishment of a college came to him immediately. But he needed a young man to begin this work; he requested one and one came. Initially, attention turned to the good and intelligent scholar Cachica; however, this candidate was soon ruled out bearing in mind that he was the only son of a grieving widow. To avoid such painful farewells and a heartbreaking separation, they thought of me instead. The elderly novice master, Father Cazaban, was tasked with informing me of the news; and that's how I found myself among these venerable missionaries.

We arrived in Buenos Aires in the final months of 1856; in December, we rented a house near St. John. We began work, and everything



Fr. Jean Magendie scj (1835 - 1925),
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1913 IN ROSARIO (ARGENTINA).

seemed to progress well. The year of 1857 passed in this way, with all of us living together in the same house and observing the rules as in Bétharram. At the beginning of 1858, Father Barbé, seeing that our missionary fathers had a good sense of direction and were working really well, turned his thoughts to founding his college. The first task was to find a house suitable for opening a school. One day, Father Barbé took me as his companion, and we wandered the streets of Buenos Aires in search of a building that matched our vision.

- The Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín, with the consent of his Council meeting on 18 and 19 November, **presents to the diaconal ministry Br. Aurélien Emeric Kouamé and Br. Salomon Yoman Bandama** from the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire (SMG Region).
- A preparatory meeting for the next Council of the Congregation between the Superior General, his Council and the three Regional Superiors was held online on 9 December.
- Next visits of the Superior General:
 - **Official visit to the community in Holy Land** (Bethlehem and Nazareth) from December 18 to 29, 2024;
 - **Canonical visit to the Vicariate of India** from January 15 to February 9, 2025;
 - **Canonical visit to the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam** from February 11 to March 8, 2025 (from February 14 to 17 in Vietnam).
- The **Council of the Congregation** will be held in Bangalore (Monfortani retreat house) from 28 January to 8 February 2025.



Ivory Coast | *Mrs Malan Tanoh Renée*, mother of Br Kouamé Brou Aurélien Émeric SCJ of the community of Saint-Palais, died on 21 November. She was 74 years old. We extend our condolences to Br Aurélien and his family for the loss of their dear mother and we promise to keep them in our prayers.

England | The England Vicariate lost a great friend in *Jane Farrell* who died on December 6 aged 69 after a long illness. Jane was a founder member of the Companions of Betharram, and represented Betharram laity at the Albavilla gathering in 2003, and came as a lay delegate to our General Chapter in 2005.

Born in Pontypridd a mining town in South Wales, she was a fluent Welsh speaker and very proud of her celtic heritage. She served the Olton community at various times as parish secretary, teacher, catechist, counsellor Eucharistic minister, reader, but above all as a trusted friend and confidante. She and her husband Peter were always active members of our Parish, as were her daughters Louise and Katie. They were all by her side when she went to the Lord on the Feast of Saint Nicholas.



Homily, holy mass at the conclusion of the ordinary general assembly of the synod of bishops

27 October 2024, Saint Peter's Basilica



[...] Let us reflect on what happened to Bartimaeus. Initially he was "sitting by the roadside" (Mk 10:46), but by the end he was called by Jesus, recovered his sight and "followed him on the way" (v. 52). (v. 52). [...]

We should remember that the Lord passes by every day. The Lord always passes by and pauses in order to attend to our blindness. We should ask ourselves, "Do I hear him passing by? Do I have the capacity to hear the Lord's footsteps? Do I have the capacity to discern when the Lord is passing by?" It is good if the Synod is urging us as a Church to be like Bartimaeus: a community of disciples who, hearing that the Lord is passing by, feel the joy of salvation, allow ourselves to be awakened by the power of the Gospel, and to cry out to him. The Church does this when it takes up the cry of all the women and men of the world. [...] We do not need a sedentary and defeatist Church, but a Church that hears the cry of the world – I wish to say this even if some might be scandalised – a Church that gets its hands dirty in serving.

[...] If initially Bartimaeus was seated, at the end we see him following Jesus along the road. [...] Bartimaeus, from where he was sitting, jumped up on his feet and immediately afterwards regained his sight. Now he can see the

Lord; he can recognize God's action in his life and finally set out to follow him. Let us do likewise. Whenever we are seated and settled, when as a Church we cannot find the strength, the courage or the boldness to arise and continue along the way, let us always remember to return to the Lord and his Gospel. We always need to return to the Lord and the Gospel. [...]

I would like to reiterate that the Gospel says of Bartimaeus that he "followed him on the way". This is an image of the synodal Church. The Lord is calling us, lifting us up when we are seated or fallen down, restoring our sight so that we can perceive the anxieties and sufferings of the world in the light of the Gospel. And when the Lord puts us back on our feet, we experience the joy of following him on the way. We follow the Lord along the way, we do not follow him enclosed in our comforts or we do not follow him in the mazes of our minds. We follow him only along the way. [...]

Brothers and sisters, not a seated Church, but a Church on her feet. Not a silent Church, but a Church that embraces the cry of humanity. Not a blind Church, but a Church, enlightened by Christ, that brings the light of the Gospel to others. Not a static Church, but a missionary Church that walks with her Lord through the streets of the world.. [...] ■

Synergy in Betharram: how do we support ourselves in government?



The strength of “us”

| Fr. Simone Panzeri scj

“Nothing about us without us” (in Latin *Nihil de nobis, sine nobis*). I came across this Latin motto at the beginning of my mandate, while I was thinking about the meaning of my service as a Regional Superior. I particularly like it because it emphasizes the pronoun “we” and does not focus on the individual. It helps me understand that my service is for “us” and that my thoughts must always be oriented towards the “us” and not towards what pleases me or is more comfortable.

Indeed, the first thing I found in my mandate is that I always face a multiple situations, colleagues, problems, communities, joys to share... which prevent me from feeling tied to a single issue. The Regional office naturally detaches me from a specific affiliation and constantly places me in a broader and more varied perspective: the “we” of the Region.... which is made up of multiple communities, confreres, young

people in formation... I realized from the beginning that my horizon should broaden and so I was asked to take to heart a “we” much bigger than that of the community in which I had lived. The trick is surely to share this condition of my life with the confreres that I meet in the various communities during my visits: I realize that at the beginning it was necessary to break the ice and make it understood that I was not just a guest passing through, but above all a brother who comes to share life, and wants to listen and be part of everyone’s life.

Secondly, this motto leads me to reflect on my way of sharing with the Regional Vicars. At the end of our first year of mandate, during the Regional Council of September 2024 in Rome, I asked the Vicars to take stock of my way and our way of sharing with the Council and with the Regional. It seemed to me that my intention to share with each

Arpondratana, Bishop of the Diocese of Chiang Mai. During the celebration, Fr. Nicolas Surasak Doohae scj made his final profession in the hands of Fr. Wilfred Pereppadan, delegate of the Superior General.

**Br. Aurélien Brou KOUAMÉ scj
and Br. Salomon BANDAMA scj**
from the Vicariate of the Ivory Coast



In the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Betharram, on Sunday 28 July, a great celebration took place. Together with the religious from all the communities of the Vicariate of France and Spain, the young participants in the international formation session, the lay members of the “Me voici” fraternity, the feast of the Virgin of the Beautiful Branch was celebrated.

In this celebration, presided over by the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín SCJ, and concelebrated by Fr. Simone Panzeri SCJ, Regional Superior of the St. Michael Garicoits Region and by Fr. Davi Lara SCJ, Regional Superior of the Ven. Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region, Br. Aurélien SCJ and Br. Salomon SCJ made their perpetual profession.

The day ended with a festive lunch shared by religious and lay people from all the communities of the Vicariate.





In 2024, three Betharramites professed their perpetual vows in the Congregation

Br. Nicolas Surasak DOOHAE scj
(Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam)

"My name is Surasak Doohae, I come from Holy Family Church Huaybong, Chiangmai Diocese. I came to know our Community by the invitation of a religious sister in 1998 and entered the Congregation of Betharram in 1999.

My important experience of growth during the formation is to know my capability to receive and share. Faith has helped me overcome myself, then I can grow up and happy.

The characteristics of the charism of St Michael Garicoits which particularly accompany me is courage, courage to obey, love, give, change and accept."

On Friday, May 10, at the Ban Betharram chapel in Chiang Mai, a solemn Eucharistic concelebration took place on the feast of Saint Michael Garicoits, presided by His Excellency Francis Xavier Vira



Regional Council of the Regio Saint Michael Garicoits in Adiapodoumé (Ivory Coast) from 22 to 27 January 2024: Br. Angelo Sala scj, Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi Ayo scj, Fr. Simone Panzeri scj, Fr. Enrico Frigerio scj, Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj.

Vicar as much as possible (thoughts, reflections, intuitions and concerns) was what they saw in my approach with each of them. The contribution of the Vicars in the discernment of situations is, in my opinion, fundamental. This is why I favour maximum openness with each of them. Sharing with them, with parrhesia¹, allows me to create a climate of trust and freedom that helps us in the processes of discernment that we implement. Each Vicar is aware of the whole situation of the Region and my thoughts concerning it. On this point, my intention is not to find solutions to the problems and challenges we face, but to find (with the Vicars) paths of discernment that, step by step, can open constructive paths for the future: the solutions are not in our hands, but we

are trying to open paths of discernment to get there. For this, this climate of constant sharing and total commitment of each vicar is indispensable. It is once again the strength of the "we" that gives us this perspective: listening, dialogue, remaining anchored in reality, plus the help of the Spirit, allow us to advance, one step at a time, together, gently entering the subject to deepen the complexity of each issue, of each brother. Of course, mistakes are made, especially at the beginning, when we claim to see everything clearly and immediately, but these same mistakes have been helpful to me to correct my personal vision and to imbue me even more with the feeling of this "we" that constitutes the great regional community. ■

¹) A courageous frankness that must inspire every authentic disciple of Christ; saying everything, and telling the truth.



Synodality and government: the observations of a regional secretary

| Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez scj

Since the end of 2023 I have been the secretary of the Region of the Venerable Father Auguste Etchecopar. This position is both a service to the brothers and a rich experience of synodality. In fact the Regional Secretary is not only responsible for the archives, but also he organizes communication, writes the minutes of the Regional Council and prepares documents for the proper functioning of the Regional Chapter (RL. § 258 to 261). Consequently he attends two fundamental instances for the government of the Region – the Council and the Chapter – and has to promote a smooth communication which is an essential aspect of synodality.

The regional administration is ruled by the rule of Life, which emphasizes the importance of the dialogue and involvement.

• Each meeting of the Regional Council, convened at least twice a year, becomes a place of active listening and joint deliberation. Though the Regional Superior chairs this council, the main decisions require, according to the case, the consent of the Council or a consultation (RL. § 242).

- The Rule plans, besides, the appointment of a Regional Bursar (devolves upon the Superior General and his Council) and the Regional Secretary (devolves upon the Regional Superior and his Council) who can be chosen *"among the religious with perpetual vows"* inside or outside the Council (RL. 252 and 257). Both of them attend the meetings of the Council. In these days, the bursar and the secretary are both outside the Council (it means that they are not Vicaries) which allows a greater number of brothers to participate.

This pattern allows to ensure that no perspective is excluded and the decisions reflect, in a choral way, the needs and hopes of the whole Region. As a secretary I try hard to faithfully register the different positions in order to keep the diversity which characterizes our Region. Even if I don't vote at the Council (composed of the Vicaries only) its members invite me to express myself and to actively participate and I do that being sure to be listened to fraternally.

Synodality, as the synodal

a betharramite religious. I thanked God for making me a member of the family of Betharram. The Brothers were always willing to give me practical and spiritual help, to help me overcome all difficulties.

Joys and sorrows accompanied these four years when I was in charge of formation. When I look back, I realise that this experience helped me to become stronger and to strengthen my sense of belonging to the Congregation. I received support and encouragement from both the superior and the brothers, in a special way from the communities in Thailand. I have never felt alone in my duties because my brothers and sisters were always there for me. When I was appointed to the Mae Pon center, my pastoral responsibilities were different from those in the formation house. In the pastoral area,

I received support and collaboration from the superior of the community, from all the members of the vicariate in Thailand, who helped me to grow in my vocation.

After more than 5 years of this experience, I would like to thank God for helping me grow with the help of the Superior General, the Regional Superior, the Regional Vicar of Thailand, and all the members of the Thai Vicariate. This experience is for me an opportunity for my ongoing formation in order to better serve the Congregation. *"Always forward"* (St. Michael Garicoits). I am always ready to do my best in my pastoral activity according to the spirit of our Congregation, readily and unreservedly, without betraying the word given, and all out of love. ■



Celebrating Christmas with families, December 2019.



help them to discern their vocation, with prayer, learning about the spirit of the community, in studying, and following the rules of the formation house: all this was not an easy task. Moreover, nowadays, taking care of the youth is more challenging than it was in the past. Today, in a world full of social media and more comfort, young people love comfort. These are challenges I had to accept.

I thought it was important for me to grow in order to respond to what had been asked of me. Although the duties were quite difficult for me, I felt motivated and I was passionate in carrying out my duty, and I did it step by step, just like our founder, St. Michael Garicoits, who as a child climbed the mountains sure that one day he would reach heaven. In the first year of my duty, I had to adjust, but everything went according to God's will.

Things seemed to go well in my duties as formator and as priest.

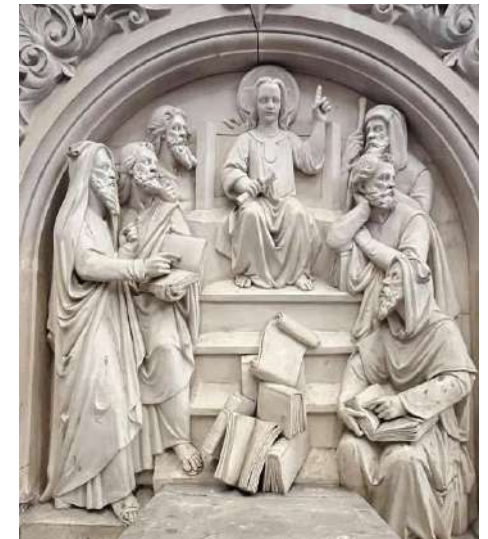
Being in the formation house, I had time for prayer, reflection, and my spiritual growth. However, the second year brought about new challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was one of the most difficult situations I had to face. Living in the formation house became more difficult, and my fears and worries increased because I had to take care not only of myself but also of the young people under my responsibility. That time gave me a lot of stress, but God did not abandon me.

During those difficult times, I would pray before the cross and look at Jesus. He gave me strength and I was aware that what I had to face was very small, compared to the love He gave me. I was very lucky to have Father Luke Kriangsak, as superior of the community who, as an elder brother, advised me, took care of me and encouraged me, all the time. Father Luke was a model for us as

assembly 2024 recalled us, is not only a method but also a way of "being Church" which foundation is Baptism.

This makes us sons in the Christ and introduces us to the people of God, whose members take part and discern in a synodal way the steps to be accomplished.

As a regional secretary I witness the fact that, when we walk together, we enrich the mission and reinforce communion. ■



My experience as Regional Vicar in France-Spain

| Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj

I have been a Regional Vicar for barely over a year, and I still feel very much like a novice in the role. I am not sure if any religious feel adequately prepared before the Superior General entrusts them with this service within the Congregation. Personally, I do not. But, as with my previous missions, I hope to learn the role a little before the end of my term, and I tell myself that, not having asked for this, I won't reproach myself too harshly if I fail.

I am not alone in this new endeavour. First and foremost, I have an adviser brother, Father Simone,

the Regional Superior, and even closer, the Vicariate Council, made up of brothers I know well. I had only known Father Simone a little and we had never worked together before. From the outset, he put me at ease as he didn't hide the fact that he too was new to the role, and I quickly noticed that he approached the task with great heart and faith. Very quickly, he brought together the new Regional Council, wishing to establish genuine teamwork by sharing responsibilities in a way that made each of us feel accountable for



Profession of faith and oath of fidelity of Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj as Regional Vicar (Regional Council held in Adiapodoumé).

the mission entrusted to us.

Together with Fathers Simone, Jean-Paul, Enrico, and Brother Angelo, I am glad, despite the difficulties of each vicariate, to understand what the religious in our Region are experiencing—both amongst themselves and in their missions, which bring them into contact with such a diversity of people. This insight nourishes my personal prayer and reflection. The interest shown by the brothers on the Council in what our Vicariate is experiencing is also a source of encouragement to press on, especially during these painful times when we must address cases of past abuse. Alongside Fathers Jean-Do and Laurent, Father Simone and I

form a “crisis team,” working closely together.

My collaboration with Father Simone is greatly facilitated by the means of communication we use constantly: phone calls via WhatsApp, video conferences on Zoom, and email correspondence. When I have questions about a particular situation, I consult him for his opinion. Likewise, he contacts me for clarification. If he needs to draft a letter, to translate the text into French, he starts with a digital translation before asking me to cast an eye over it.

Father Laurent, who preceded me, told me the challenges of “administrative matters,” were very awkward and he was absolutely right. But, I do not feel alone in this either. Marie-Pauline, our Vicariate secretary, has an excellent grasp of many issues, and I trust her while ensuring she is not left to make decisions on her own. Likewise, the Economic Council provides valuable support in specialised areas such as finance, property, and agricultural and woodland management. Father Simone remains close, as can be seen from the fact he does not hesitate to come to the Vicariate. For example, he has attended meetings of the Economic Council and discussions about the future of the Saint-Michel



Personal growth and synergy with the superiors

| Fr. Manop Kaengkhaio scj

“God is everything, I am nothing”. This is the motto I have chosen to live my life in following Jesus, in the spirit of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram. Above all, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be a small instrument in his hands.

The call to do this work is not for all and not all are willing to accept his will. Being one of his ministers and having an active part in this missionary work is a great blessing for me.

Now I have been a priest for more than 5 years. My feelings and my life are different from the time of my formation. During that period, when I was a novice, I was someone who mainly used to receive help: I was taken care of, I was trained, and many other things. It was a time to learn many things, but mainly in theory. However, after this period of formation, my role and responsibilities changed in many ways. From one who used to receive, I became one who was called to give. It was a time to work in the field, involved in practical activities. Therefore, the work became more difficult.

I remember that after my graduation in theology, I went to

do an internship at the missionary area of St. Paul's Church, Huay Tong. At one point, the then Regional Superior, Father Austin Hughes, visited the community at Huay Tong and asked me whether I was willing to take care of the young candidates at Ban Betharram, Sam Phran. At that time, it was quite difficult for me to take a decision because I had no confidence in my abilities and I felt that I was not good enough for that post. But eventually, as a religious, I decided to accept the appointment and to do my best. In making my discernment, I focussed on the motto of the congregation, “*Here I am Lord, to do Your will*” and I accepted this challenging appointment.

After my ordination, I was given the responsibility of taking care of the young candidates (years 4-6) who studied at St. Joseph's Upatham School. I felt the pressure of my role as formator of young boys. The challenge was to be a good example for the younger ones. Therefore, the various disciplines I had practiced when I was in formation helped me a lot as a formator. In addition, the most important thing in taking care of the candidates was that I had to

better, by getting more interested in what the Congregation was realizing elsewhere in the world, and by sharing the joys and problems of the Vicariates of the same Region.

The collaboration between the Vicariates of the same Region has made the life and mission of each easier, in spite of the situation of frailty due to the loss of some brothers, which is notorious in the most ancient Vicariates. (In the General Chapter of 2011, we were 248 religious of perpetual vows, and 35 of temporary vows. According to the 2024 directory, we are 228 religious of perpetual vows and 22 of temporary vows).

The route of regionalization has prepared us, without wanting it, to walk more together, and thus to integrate the synodal process the

Church is undertaking. The problems of each Vicariate imply the others in discernment, and in the decisions taken by the Regional Council.

The Rule of Life of 2012 wanted to widen the communion and participation between the members of the Congregation, through the means of the Vicariates on a regional level, and by establishing that the General Council would always include the presence of at least one member of each Vicariate.

Up to now, we have covered only a small part of the route. However, the fruit brought by this organization of the Congregation are already important. Without any doubt, by going on walking on this route, we will discover new blessings. ■

House in Pau. We were also together when we met with the Bishop of Bayonne.

Finally, this working together is encouraged by the Bétharram community, which is always welcoming to the Regional Superior

and bears with my absences and my presence. And that is how I continue on this journey, under no illusions—I know I will remain, as Saint Michael would say, a “*patraque*” (a bungler) for a long time yet. ■



A Genuine Synodal Journey

| Fr. Graziano Sala scj

At times, people have asked where the idea of “Regionalization” came from. The frequent question was this: why change?

We are in a time when the term “synodality” is cited constantly. It seems that this “magical” word opens up new and unknown ecclesial horizons. By sprinkling the term “synodality” here and there in one’s discourse, some believe they are being “à la page” (trendy).

However, we forget that the life of our Congregation (like all others) is founded on a path of synodality that makes (or should make) every journey of us religious and every decision taken at every level not only the fruit of discernment but of discernment carried out together. This process starts with the Superior

of a community and extends to the Superior General with their Council.

From this idea emerged a new approach: Regionalization. It did not arise from the desire to innovate the governance structure of the Congregation (which could be debated) as if the previous form had become outdated. While appreciating the experiences of the recent past, a shift in perspective was deemed necessary. The essence of regionalization lies precisely in recognizing every religious member of a community as the essential locus where a true discernment is born, grows and matures. It is not about an individual acting alone but an individual within a community. Not a Superior making decisions alone but a Superior who listens, animates, fosters communion, discerns, and



ultimately decides.

A community Superior conveys the sentiments of their community to the Vicariate level (Vicariate Council), and from there to the Region (Regional Council). The Council of the Congregation, rather than being a "top-down" communication, becomes a call to listen "from below," that is, to the life of the Regions, the Vicariates of the Regions and their communities.

Every step is marked by listening, a comprehensive vision, and shared discernment. If you wish, the vision of Regionalization, rather than evoking a "pyramidal" structure, recalls an

"oval" form. In this circular model, the core elements are mutual listening, sharing, and dialogue always carried out in charity and truth.

Outside this vision, Regionalization risks becoming merely a sterile, debatable, and perhaps even useless structure.

Therefore, when we invoke and mention the word "synodality," let us remember that our Rule of Life, with its Regional framework, helps and commits us to live it. This is because the Rule of Life desires that each of its members "walk together" (Σύνodos, σύνοδος). ■

Adrogué.

This coordination contributed a lot to communion and participation, which were more and more fruitful. A joint mission was launched in Bolivia, which might have lasted longer and be more efficient if the post of Coordinator had had some power. The project was abandoned for, at that time, two vice Provinces lacked motivation; so the whole responsibility of the project was falling on the Rio de la Plata Province (Argentina-Uruguay), which already had other missionary engagements.

Fr. Radaelli, drawing his inspiration from the experience lived in America and from what other congregations were doing because of the constant diminution of the number of their religious, at the General Chapter of 2005, proposed to organize the Congregation into Regions. Some changes were voted *ad experimentum* by this Chapter, so that the commission in charge of revising the Rule of Life might experiment them.

According to the decisions of the General Chapter of 2005, the Council of the Congregation¹ held in Bangalore in 2007, determined that the three Regions would take office as soon as the beginning of 2009 *ad experimentum*. Thus, three Regions and twelve Vicariates were created; after the evaluation of the experience in the Chapter of 2011, the latter were

reduced to eleven².

In the General Chapter of 2011, in Bethlehem, the revised Rule of Life was voted and adopted, including the articles of the regionalization already voted *ad experimentum* in 2005. The Congregation of the Religious approved the new Rule of Life voted in the Chapter, except the fact that all the "Vicars" would be Vicars in the meaning defined by the Canon Law³. Only one person could have this "ordinary vicarious power", he was named "First Vicar" in the Rule of life (cf article n° 251).

Along those fifteen years, the experience of regionalization revealed itself positive as a whole, both in Latin America as in other parts of the Congregation: training unified in each Region, at least for the novitiate, which in the past would have been unthinkable, exchange of formators, exchange of religious between the Vicariates, economical help between Vicariates, capitular experiences and meetings, etc.

The regionalization of those fifteen years has allowed the religious of each Vicariate to widen their vision of the Congregation, by welcoming with humility the collaboration of the religious from other Vicariates, with their lights and their shadows, by knowing the life of the Congregation



About regionalization

| Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

The communities in Latin America have been pioneers in creating a Regional spirit in our Congregation. The first ELAB (Betharramite-Latino-American meeting) which took place in Adrogué in January 1986 was the starting point. Other ELAB followed and were celebrated in Passaquatro, Lambaré, etc. They were open to the participation of all the religious of the three (vice) provinces. I do say « celebrated », for those three meetings were true festive moments:

Provincials, formators, formees, young Betharramites, parish priests, educators, etc. of the three (Vice) Provinces gathered together.

Fr. Francesco Radaelli, General Superior at that time, understood that this dynamism needed to be organized and coordinated.

- So, at first, coordinators were successively named: Fr. José Mirande (jr), Fr. Bruno Ierullo and myself.

- Then a novitiate was created in 2002 for the three (Vice)Provinces in

2) Two Vicariates, namely the Vicariate of Northern Italy and the Vicariate of Central-Southern Italy, were reduced to one: the Vicariate of Italy.

3) Canon Law n° 131- § 2. The ordinary power of governance can be either proper or vicarious

1) In the former version of the Rule of life, this Council had the power of decision