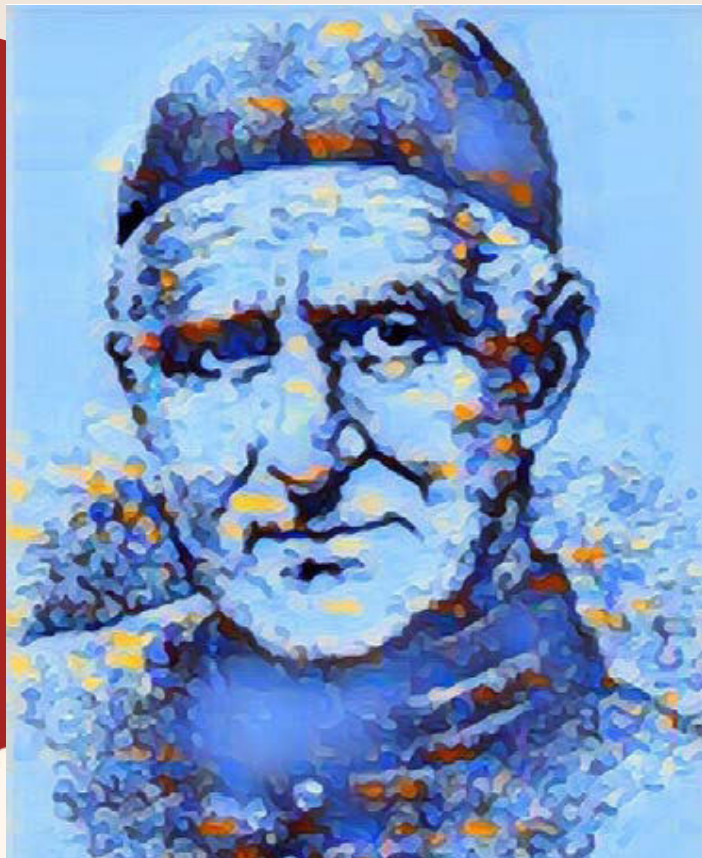


“

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)



Societas Sacratissimi
Cordis Jesu

Betharram



Nef

2025

Nouvelles En Famille



Betharram on the road to
a more synodal heart

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also had the opportunity to explore the city. In his usual emphatic yet passionate style, he described to his sisters the places he visited³: "Yesterday, I had the joy of celebrating Mass in the dark prison from which St. Peter and St. Paul were led to the glory of martyrdom and heaven; today, on the tomb containing the bodies of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence, who loved Jesus with a love stronger than fire and death. We visited the great basilicas, especially St. Peter's, the most splendid palace ever built on earth for the princes of Jesus' army; St. Paul's, so resplendent with its modern magnificence. And the Ara Coeli... This morning, I visited the Catacombs of St. Callixtus and St. Sebastian, that immense tomb where, for three centuries, the Church of Jesus remained buried in the humiliations and martyrdoms of the Cross; from which it finally rose to reign through this Cross over the entire world. Oh, how happy I was!"

On 22nd October, he was overjoyed to meet Pope Pius IX in an audience, where he shook and kissed the Pope's hands and received a special blessing for the Congregation.

On Saturday, 23rd October, he left

3) Letter to his sisters, Madeleine and Suzanne, 20th October 1875.

4) Letter to his sisters, Madeleine and Suzanne, 5th November 1875.

Rome: "On the return journey from Rome, what happiness it was to cross the magnificent plains on the way to Florence, bordered by towns and villages perched on the slopes of mountains in an enchanting landscape, whose names evoke the most pious memories for a Christian soul: Foligno... Cortona... Assisi..."⁴

We do not know the exact date of his arrival in Betharram, but he was there by 1st November, the day when 17 young men made their vows at the Bétharram sanctuary.

Having obtained the necessary information, Father Etchecopar set to work on a new draft of the Constitutions. This would be a long task, requiring him to travel to Rome the following year.

Roberto Cornara



particularly on the revision of the vow of poverty.²

The departure was scheduled for Monday, 11th October. *"I made stops to rest well in Toulouse, Sète, Marseille, Genoa, and Pisa... I visited the magnificent relics of St. Sernin in Toulouse and gazed with indescribable joy upon St. Catherine of Genoa, in the reliquary containing her entire body,"* he wrote to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne on 20th October 1875. He arrived in Rome on Saturday, 20th October, where he was welcomed at

the French Seminary in the city.

Little is known about his meetings with Fr. Bianchi or the content of their discussions. It is known, however, that the Constitutions required significant modifications: the vow of poverty had to be absolute and uncompromising. The style of the text also had to change, becoming more concise and closer to a legal document than a spiritual treatise characteristic of Betharramite spirituality.

During his stay in Rome, Fr. Etchecopar

2) References to the reasons for this trip can be found in a letter to Fr. Magendie in Argentina dated 2nd December 1875.

Betharram on the road to a more synodal heart

"When they came to the city, they went up to the room where they usually met. They were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon Zealot, and Judas son of James. They were all praying together, together with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts 1:13-14)



Dear Betharramites,

As we make our pilgrimage in 2025, we will celebrate, together with the whole Church, the Jubilee Year. The last Assembly of the Synod of Synodality drew up a "road map" for us and invited us to travel with a renewed heart.

We all know that Betharram is emerging from 2024, a year of trials and is setting out on a journey *with bare and wounded feet*, just like the pilgrim feet of Jesus. However, joyful hearts must never be lacking, and this will be the sign that the Spirit of Jesus is guiding us. This complex and challenging reality also invites us to be even more faithful and creative. It provokes us in a healthy way.

Synodality – as we already know – is not a fad, or a passing fancy of the papacy of Francis, but has been *a constitutive dimension of the Church since the first centuries of its existence*. Its objective is for us all to unite in a process (path) of spiritual renewal and deep structural reform, to make the Church more participatory and missionary; that is, more capable of walking with every man and woman in this world radiating the Light of Christ.



Dljfdghghgerghkndkngnshgdsohgowhgrohgi

Why do we Betharramites subscribe to this project? Because we are *followers of the Heart of Jesus in community*. We are a community in mission that discerns like the disciples of Jesus. He, from the first moment of entering the world, *became a pilgrim and always allowed himself to be inspired by the Spirit* of his

Father, to suffer and do what God ordered, even giving his life for all on the Cross. We Betharramites do not walk alone, but with the laity and with all the men and women of this world. *Synodality is the journey together of Christians with Christ towards the Kingdom of God, in union with all humanity* (Cf. Final Synod Doc No. 28). Embodying this communal aspect of walking demands a change of mentality, against the scourges of individualism, clericalism and abuse in all its forms.

It involves meeting in assembly at the different levels of the life of the Church, the parish, the school, the ecclesial services, the councils; *and listening to one another, dialoguing, discerning in community and reaching a consensus as an expression of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Spirit*. It means collaborating together to make the most appropriate decisions, feeling that we are *all* co-responsible in the search for the common good beyond our differences.

This new way of being Church would qualify the life and mission of Betharram *in the Church*, both in its way of being and acting. To achieve this, ecclesial structures and processes are needed that are at the service of the authorised discernment of the Church. That is why we are all invited to participate – when

Starting with this issue of the NEF, a series of historical articles begins on the travels that Fr. Etchecopar undertook

abroad: eight trips to Rome, two trips to the Holy Land, and the visit to Argentina and Uruguay.

FATHER ETCHECOPAR'S TRAVELS

First Trip to Rome October 1875

Fr. Etchecopar's first trip to Rome fell within the context of the approval of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Betharram as a Congregation of Pontifical Right. We know the story and the decisive intervention of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified. This young Carmelite from Pau experienced a divine vision in ecstasy, inviting the religious of Bétharram to bring their Constitutions to Rome for approval by the Holy See. This was fulfilled, and the prediction of the saintly Carmelite came true: at the beginning of August 1875, Fr. Etchecopar received from Rome the *Breve Laudativum* recognising Betharram as a pontifical institute, free from the supervision of the diocesan bishop.

However, it was necessary to correct, improve, and supplement the Constitutions on various points to ensure they complied with the current regulations for religious Congregations and canon law. A key point for correction concerned the vow of poverty¹. In this work of revision, Fr. Etchecopar received invaluable assistance from Fr. Raimondo Bianchi, the Procurator General of the Dominican Fathers, who resided at the convent of Santa Maria della Minerva in Rome.

To facilitate these revisions, Fr. Etchecopar decided to travel personally to Rome to discuss the work with Fr. Bianchi and seek clarifications,

¹) On this aspect, see the study of Fr. Gaspar Fernandez in the supplement to NEF no. 188, January 2023: *The correction of the Constitutions and the wish for poverty*.

Four ordinations to the diaconate have closed the year 2024 and inaugurated the new year 2025 in our religious family:

- In Paraguay, Br. Oscar Mendoza was ordained a deacon on November 30, 2024 at La Colmena.
- In Thailand, the ordination of Br. Nicolas Surasak Doohae was celebrated on 3 January 2024 in Chiang Mai.
- In France, Br. Aurélien Kouamé and Br. Salomon Bandama were ordained deacons on 12 January at Saint-Palais.

We wish all them a happy ministry!

Fr. Davi Lara scj, Regional Superior of the Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar, communicated that the scholastic, Br. Anibal Morán Romero (Vicariate of Paraguay), did not renew the temporary vows.

From 16 January to 8 February, the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín scj, will be making the canonical visitation to the Vicariate of India.

The Council of Congregation is going to be held in Bangalore from 28 January to 8 February.



our superiors call us – to collaborate with the discernment of the fundamental questions that concern the evangelising mission entrusted to us, together with the great challenge of being an *international*, intercultural and intergenerational family.

Today it seems easy to forget *to what purpose* we are called to the mission. *Evangelising is the essential mission of the Church, it is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, its profound identity* (cf. EN 14). The ideal of St. Michael Garicoits for his sons does not imply an enterprise “tailored to each one,” but is rather a community project, founded on Love which draws one to consecrate oneself *after having lived a deep experience of contemplation*: the self-emptying of the Son saying “Here I am, Father, I come to do your will.” We are a *mobile camp of soldiers* who march at the first signal of our leaders wherever they send us, discerning synodally *where that place is*, but always within the framework of an obedience out of love and not like a religious who “plays hard to get.” We do not count the cost, but free ourselves from everything that prevents us from giving ourselves entirely to mission, and we do so with an immense love for the Kingdom of God.

Synodality was not “invented” to water down our commitment to communion and mission. On the contrary, it comes *to wake us up* and tell us: Christ needs us here or over there. How will we answer him?... This synodal challenge, although slow and sustained, leads us to change our hearts, that is, to live a “synodal conversion” that helps us to leave behind our own interests to put the Will of God first.

In recent times, our religious family has been taking steps towards a greater presence in the midst of the new poor, but it is still a very discreet presence, little by little. They illustrate a horizon of needs and make their cries heard. I hope that we Betharramites “realistically” discern our true place in the mission of the Church today and do not resort to boasting of an apparently “successful” past which had another context and other human and material means. That past, if we look at it carefully, also reveals itself to us today as full of weaknesses and even a dark side that we ignored or did not want to see... Perhaps that past and that old mentality were not as glorious as we supposed.

Our humanity – redeemed by Christ – is always tainted by original sin– and the mystery of iniquity reaches us through the centuries with its deep wound.

Walking in the truth, recognizing and repairing what we did wrong (and thanks to a realism that does not deceive), the Word of God would find in us a fertile ground to effect conversion. Through this grace that Christ offers us, we will be able to experience today what He himself made the disciples of Emmaus, who walked discouraged, come to see: *Did not the Messiah have to suffer and go through all this torment to enter into his glory?* (cf. Lk 24:26).

We have a special year ahead of us, perhaps it will be hard, but it is a Jubilee year. We want that mercy that the Church offers us, to also permeate our vocation and mission as consecrated Betharramites. May this 2025 find us hopeful, reconciled, united and at peace with one another.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

Superior General

QUESTIONS TO SHARE IN COMMUNITY:

1. *Has anything changed in you as a religious since the Church proposed "making a journey" together with all the People of God? What does this proposal provoke in you?*
2. *Do you feel any resistance or fear in opening up and fraternally sharing the Gospel with all men and women without distinction of race, culture, age, social condition, religion, etc.?*
3. *What concrete experiences are there today in your community that express a synodal heart?*

Father, through faith you lead us to Jesus, he is the unfailing strength which fills us. Give us a pure faith, a faith detaching us from everything, a strong faith which prepares us to everything, a faith which makes us courageous and audacious. It is already the gift you grant us by the passion and death of Jesus-Christ".

PETTAN, in St.Palais, you were accompanying the team of the Christian Movement of Retired People, and the Fraternity of lay people linked to St. Michaël Garicoïts and Betharram. And you rendered a lot of services in the parish. One of your brothers, here, at midday, told me that you had worked a lot during your life. You were also faithful to your Basque family : with Piarra you regularly visited Juxue and Sallespisse.

You were not content only with praying, you also had your feet on the ground. I shall only quote some elements and anecdotes, not to be too long. For instance the beautiful garden full of vegetables you were taking care of in St. Palais was admired by many acquaintances and amateurs. In Casablanca, in Morocco, you enjoyed teaching Spanish. In Casablanca, also, you belonged to a team which, with and around the pelota, had established warm and friendly links between Morocco and the Basque

country. Yourself, Pettan, you were a good pelota player, dreaded and formidable. With your brother Piarra (Pierre), a religious of Betharram like you, you had unconditional supporters on the pelota court of Juxue, your native village.

To come back to faith, it was moved by a real hope. What a coincidence : our Pope Francis has just made us enter the Jubilee Year which happens every 25 years. And precisely this time its title is "Pilgrims of Hope". Here you are, Pettan, you have just arrived at the end of this pilgrimage. Hope is grace, so it is inspired by God.

Pettan, your brother Piarra, Jean-Baptiste Olçomendy and Junes Casenave, the 4 whom I had joined in 2015 in the community of St.Palais, and all this numberless crowd with whom you are blessed with the vision of God and his Peace, I don't wish you a Happy New Year, but the blissful eternity in our God of Tenderness.

Pettan, thank you for everything, and with you let us give grace to God. To the joy of meeting all in plenitude in the Eternal Light that you, in the marvelous next world, you are already transmitting to us !

Amen.

Fr. Joseph Ruspil scj

† **Fr. Bertrand SALLA scj**

Juxue, 30 May 1928 • Betharram, 31 December 2024 (France)

Pettan¹, PETTAN, like so many other brothers of our religious family of Betharram, I have had the luck and grace to live community life with you, during a few years in Saint-Palais.

The main message I remember from you and your testimony is your

interior life and spiritual life. Yes, you are a man of prayer and meditation. I was seized, in the good sense of the world, by the choice of your readings, magazines and books, it was always the same direction, it was truly to nourish your interior life, and you shared it and made us benefit from it. Clearly, GOD was the priority for you.

Your deep way of celebrating Mass did not leave me indifferent. And the conviction with which you transmitted your faith and your message linked to the Gospel might sometimes surprise us, but it was said, and it was you, Pettan. St. Michaël Garicoïts, Ibarre, Fr. Etchecopar and Betharram took a great place for you and in you : you showed this and proved this most often by your faithfulness.

In particular, you liked this prayer by St. Michaël Garicoïts : *"Lord, God the*

1) "Bertrand" in Basque.



From the Homily for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR BEGINNING OF THE ORDINARY JUBILEE

Saint Peter's Basilica, 24 December 2024

[...] Sisters and brothers, this is the Jubilee. This is the season of hope in which we are invited to rediscover the joy of meeting the Lord. The Jubilee calls us to spiritual renewal and commits us to the transformation of our world, so that this year may truly become a time of jubilation. A jubilee for our mother Earth, disfigured by profiteering; a time of jubilee for the poorer countries burdened beneath unfair debts; a time of jubilee for all those who are in bondage to forms of slavery old and new.

All of us have received the gift and task of bringing hope wherever hope has been lost, lives broken, promises unkept, dreams shattered and hearts overwhelmed by adversity. We are called to bring hope to the weary who have no strength to carry on, the lonely oppressed by the bitterness of failure, and all those who are broken-hearted. To bring hope to the interminable, dreary days of prisoners, to the cold and dismal lodgings of the poor, and to

all those places desecrated by war and violence. (...)

The Jubilee has now opened so that all people may receive hope, the hope of the Gospel, the hope of love and hope of forgiveness.

As we contemplate the manger, as we gaze upon it and see God's tender love in the face of the Child Jesus, let us ask ourselves: *"Are our hearts full of expectation? Does this hope find a place there? ... As we contemplate the loving kindness of God who overcomes our doubts and fears, let us also contemplate the grandeur of the hope that awaits us. ... May this vision of hope illumine our path each day"* (C. M. Martini, Christmas Homily, 1980).

Dear sister, dear brother, on this night the "holy door" of God's heart lies open before you. Jesus, God-with-us, is born for you, for me, for us, for every man and woman. And remember that with him, joy flourishes; with him, life changes; with him, hope does not disappoint. ■



The Synodal Style

Sinodality and mission: a renewed style of proclaiming the Good News • P. Tobia Sosio scj

Perhaps the word Synodality is used less now, replaced by Hope; but there remains a commitment for every Christian, and even more so of every Consecrated person, to make the word a lifestyle, a way of facing any mission, a particular spirit.

The first group of Apostles asked themselves several times, even while holding the first Council, to discern how to go about Jesus' command "Go into all the world and announce the Good News": Who is the world? And who are those who do not know our Law? And those who persecute us? And the thousands of recent converts?

In the end they opted for the essential, for the spirit necessary to face such an arduous Mission: "Look how they love one another...": the first authentic Pilgrims of Hope.

Those of us who work in different missions, educational, parish, health, lay movements, etc. We often feel tired of the many polarisations that continue to characterise the Church and society today: why can't they come to an agreement? People who work with us question us. We

suffer when we see the attacks, even malicious ones, against Pope Francis... It was certainly a divine inspiration to have called all believers and people of good will to a long time of listening, dialogue, discernment: there may have been those who expected decisions in one direction or another, others were happy to finally be able to sit together at the table, young people, cardinals, women... However, this journey together, Pilgrims of Hope, must continue, and is not limited to a Jubilee Year, but must characterise our lifestyle, our style of being Church, our style of mission. These seem to me to be its main characteristics:

First of all: **Look outwards and not at our navel.** Ask ourselves personally and as a community: what image do I have of God? Does this resemble the God of Israel, the One who sustains Abraham's dreams, the One who listens to the cry of his people, the One who with great patience leads towards full liberation, always prioritising the good of the person over the fulfillment of the Law, the One who wanted to be called, and will always be the God-with-us?



parish garden, and managed to make a profit while doing so. He prided himself that his popular Lourdes & Holy Land Pilgrimages were always cheaper than anyone else's, especially those of the Diocese!

It was St. Joseph's Whitnash where he served longest (22 years) and was the place he came to call home. People appreciated his dedication and devotion to ministry, and it was there that he encouraged and developed the Companions of Betharram.

Today we are still in the high Christmas season, hence our white vestments and not usual funeral colours. And we know that after the joy of stable Bethlehem, there came the flight into Egypt, with Jesus Mary and Joseph fleeing for their lives. They had to make a new start in a new land, where

they had to learn a new language, and new customs. They had to make the best of it, with Joseph using carpenter skills to find work ... without a work permit!

Father Brian always made best of it, and used his skills and talents to build up the family of Christ.

[...] Our faith is founded on the sure and certain hope that Jesus who made his home among us in the stable of Bethlehem, died and rose for us and gave us a share in his life. So in that faith we hand Brian over into His hands, believing he has already heard those words of Jesus: 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master!'

*Fr. Austin Hughes scj*¹

1) From the homily for the funeral of Fr. Brian Alphonsus Boyle.

† Fr. Brian BOYLE scj

Belfast (Northern Ireland), 27 January 1931 • Droitwich (England), 19 December

My first memory of Fr Brian was back in 1963 when as a young boy I heard him sing the Holy Week liturgy at Coughton, the little church close by our junior seminary at Sambourne. He sang with a fine tenor voice and later at seminary he also taught me to sing. The Christmas carols we have been singing these last few weeks bring back memories of those days. He taught maths and English at our seminary and music too, going on to teach the same subjects at the Sacred Heart College Droitwich for 14 years.

Back in the 1970s there was no Ryanair, so he organised adventurous summer camping expeditions for the school boys, taking them to places far and wide. As a scholastic I joined as a driver his 1974 expedition with the schoolboys to France, Spain, Portugal and North Africa. 1974 was the year of the Portuguese revolution, and in Lisbon there was danger in the air. But Fr Brian was unafraid of danger zones, perhaps because he had grown up in 1930s Belfast, where you had to learn to navigate danger zones to stay alive!

Fr Brian always enjoyed an argument and was not averse to winding people up! (one of his many talents!) But he always ended an argument with a smile and a chuckle and there was never any malice.

Many people here today are grateful for his ministry ... especially from his Droitwich & Sambourne teaching days. Along with maths & music, he directed major school drama productions, a few composed by himself.

Some of these were reprised at Holy Name parish a decade later, and it is a joy to see some of the young actors from those dramas as mature adults here today.

Father Brian never claimed to be conventionally pious, but the many friendships he made over the years witness to a desire to serve God's people and a willingness to use his talents in the service of others. His was a kind of 'everyday holiness' that connected with people. Several people said last night that you could talk to him easily. There was no clerical standoffishness about him.

One of his many talents was financial: he had an eye for a bargain! I sometimes teased him with Jesus words: 'The children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind, than are the children of light'. (Luke 16.8) He secured a bargain price for building a new parish hall at Holy Name parish 40 years ago. Then at Whitnash 30 years ago he bought and sold the house next door, to increase the



From that perspective of God: **Listening to people, to the people who are believers or not, prioritising the humble and simple, the poor and vulnerable.** "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden all this from the wise and the learned and have revealed it to little ones (Mt. 11:25). Forgive me if, sometimes, among the wise and the learned, I see many fanatics with cassocks, incense and big white collars. Looking at reality with the eyes of God was already the icon of the Year of Mercy. The Good Shepherd and his sheep on his shoulders, sharing an eye, in order to love and be loved.

A third movement, always indispensable for "walking together": **that the work tables, meetings,**

workshops, etc. be as synodal as possible, elderly and young, religious and lay people (I cannot conceive of any mission without them), men and women, perhaps also and always more so the Local Congregation and Church.

Finally, the element that cannot be found in the market, nor in books: **The Spirit with which one walks, goes out towards life, accompanies and values dreams, inspires Hope,** that theological virtue, which sometimes, but not always coincides with our desires and projects.

It has been a happy coincidence to celebrate the Jubilee Year, almost as if it were the fruit of the synodal journey; enormous challenges and goals, for many unattainable, such as world

peace, reconciliation between Zionist Jews and Palestinians, social justice that would even forgive unjustly imposed debts...we feel too small,

greatly diminished in number and also sick and elderly...but God-with-us also makes himself small to make us great, and for Him "nothing is impossible". ■

Sinodality in the Betharramite Formation Team •

Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj

The word 'Synodality' has become so popular, famous, well known, vibrantly utilized and well used today. From the beginning of the betharramite formation team, synodality is so alive and active. It is to say that when the preliminary document of the General Council presented to the General Chapter in Rome in 1993, the formators were invited to attend the council of the congregation. Then, there was a meeting of European formators at Olton and the other at Martin Coronado by the Latin American formators. Later, there was also another team work at Nazareth and then at Bethlehem which progressively produced the rich document called 'Formation Guide'. It was the fruit of 'true synodality'.

Yes, I participate in the betharramite formation team since 2012 and I have always seen synodality. The formation team with the General Council has brought about lot of orientations, guidelines and directives. They were

ever the results of generous sharing of every one's experience from various levels of formation. They were the fruits of an attentive listening to one another. They were even special times of seeing together the challenges as stepping stones to grow...grow together in order to go forward.

The multi-complexed society is on a constant, progressive and continual change. It draws us necessarily to be attentive. In this drastically changing world, the challenge us not to form 'supermen' rather in the 'sequela Christi' to form 'alter Christus'; the challenge is to form men after the model of Christ with the personal and intimate experience of Christ.

Hence, the betharramite formation team of the third millennium is challenged. In the year of HOPE as the congregation desires to WALK TOGETHER in the SYNODAL PATH. I see particularly three aspects which can help the betharramite formation



with all the inhabitants he could meet during different events, in joy as well as in sorrow and whatever their social position was. During this Eucharist we have to thank the Lord for this good shepherd he has inspired.

Father Jean in his life of a religious man and priest encourages us, his young brothers, to be good shepherds, shepherds according to Jesus' heart, this Sacred Heart which is cherished in Betharram. He also encourages you, all of you, his family, his former parishioners, to be close to your shepherds, to know them, to work with them, to serve the mission of the Church wherever you are to be

first and foremost witnesses of hope.

Now Fr Jean is invited to a banquet prepared by the Lord for all the peoples according to the words of prophet Isai and as for us we celebrate the Lord's meal which feeds our hope and brings us in communion with Fr Jean and all those who left us. This is how the Lord loves and saves us. May we, thus, welcome and spread peace, especially this Christmas period.

Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj¹

¹ From the homily for the funeral of P. Jean Suberbielle.

After the death of three of our brethen in recent weeks, and on the eve of the publication of this bulletin in January, we received the news of the departure of **Fr. Mario Bulanti scj**, died at the age of 96.

Fr. Mario was a member of the community

† Fr. Jean SUBERBIELLE scj

Bénéjac, 2 February 1928 • Betharram, 18 December 2024 (France)

Father Jean has finished the climbing of his last mountain. In a postcard addressed to his Superior, he wrote in 1985: *"I am in Cauterets where I spend a few days to relax and to rest climbing 300 meters"*. So, this time you are on the highest summit where you will find the eternal rest, where the Lord has prepared "for all the peoples a banquet" according to the words of the prophet Isai.

"Here is our Lord, in him we hoped and he saved us". These words deliver to us the main message to welcome in this day when you accompany our brother Jean to his last resting place in this Christmas Eve which will see the beginning of our Jubilee Year "Pilgrims of Hope" will be the theme of this year. Today we will give thanks to the Lord for the Pilgrim of Hope that the Father Jean has been amidst us; in your parishes of Sarrance, Montaut-

of Albavilla (Region San Michael Garicoïts, Vicariate of Italy). We will pay tribute to him in the next issue.

May Our Lady of Betharram and St. Michael Garicoïts welcome them into the Betharram of Heaven.

Lestelle, particularly but also beyond that how not to think of the mission of Betharram he inaugurated in 1969 in Ivory Coast with the Fathers Prévost and Monnot.

"I am the good shepherd", Jesus told us in the Gospel. This is a good picture familiar to us in our area. *"I know my own and my own know me."* *"I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too."* These words are Jesus' and we understand very well because we know how Jesus was a good shepherd when he walked through towns and villages of his time. These words of "Good Shepherd" make us think of Fr Jean, don't they? Was he not a good shepherd himself? You have known him and you have been witnesses of how close to you he was not only with practising parishioners but also



team to be little more vibrant, active, effective and practical.

The first aspect is to have representatives from all walks of life. It means to go back to the origin. In the beginning, the formation team worked and walked with General Council, the provincials, the formators and various other persons. It is so necessarily to include people from various walks of life like people who serve the youth, people who participate in the education of the young, people who work in various other apostolate, people with multiple experience and of course people who are committed to formation of the young.

The second aspect is to respect the diversity in the congregation. The regionalization did not mean to better independent rather to be synodal,

to respect each culture, language, tradition and to have a meaningful greater exchange. It requires to be taken care at this juncture of changing world.

The third aspect is to maintain more and more an open, honest and sincere dialogue without neglecting attentive listening to every single person. Yes, when we have honesty, sincerity and openness in our sharing, dialogue and listening; the society that the sacred heart has conceived and formed will walk together in Hope.

May this year of Hope, may our walking together in the synodal process make us all more effective in living our religious life. ■



10 characteristics of a 'seriously' synodal Church ·

Fr. Gerardo Ramos scj

A synodal Church:

- 1) **Focusses on** the reality of the poor & vulnerable, and does so from the geographical and existential peripheries, not from the comfortable armchair of a living room or by surfing the internet as a spectator. True contemplation arises from a real encounter through experience.
- 2) **Listens** in a disciple-like manner to the often confusing voices around us. Above all, those silenced by pain, bafflement, injustice or hopelessness. 'This church is moved by the lonely or helpless brother'.
- 3) **Engages in dialogue** by going out of itself, to seek to understand the different, distant and distinct 'other' as a companion on the journey. It tries to enter into the world of the other and of others. It does not pontificate from a height, but rather teaches by empathizing and learning.
- 4) **Respects** and values the 'other', and not only the ordained ministers, but those others, in their many human groupings, seeing in them the presence of Christ manifesting himself in mystery. It will cultivate a creative and delicate approach, which has as its horizon & goal to give rise to a fraternal and cordial affection, deep and sincere.
- 5) **Especially includes** those who could be left out of all ties and communion, not only ecclesial. It tries to ensure that 'nothing (or no one) is lost'. It values different capacities in a people of God that is 'polyhedral irregular', where there should not be two identical faces, and where often the smallest are the most original.
- 6) **Discerns** in the Spirit, beginning



this *Instrumentum laboris*, which considers "conversation in the Spirit" as a gift of the latter, is the following:

"Through this method, the grace of the Word and the Eucharist becomes a felt, actualised and transforming reality, which attests to and realises the initiative by which the Lord Jesus makes himself present and active in the Church. Christ sends us out on mission and gathers us around himself to give thanks and glory to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Hence from all continents comes the request that this method may increasingly animate and inform the daily life of the Churches." (IL n° 34).

Further developments of this method,

which is a means of sharing faith experiences, can be found among the documents of the last Synod. This method is already used in meetings of the Superiors General and in other spheres of community discernment. It can be adopted in community meetings, with the necessary adaptations. What is important is to understand that the conversation in the Spirit has the purpose of sharing spiritual experiences and of preparing ourselves to be guided, both personally and at the community level, by the Holy Spirit, renewing our call and our choice to be on the side of Jesus, our Master, whom we have chosen to follow within this community of Betharram. ■

It is not enough to draw up a report listing the most often mentioned points. Rather, discernment is needed, which also pays attention to marginal and prophetic voices and does not overlook the significance of the points on which disagreement emerges. The Lord is the cornerstone that will allow the "building" to stand and the Spirit, the master of harmony, will help to move from cacophony to symphony." (IL n°39)

"The journey leads to a prayer of praise to God and gratitude for the experience. "When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God" (EG 272). This, in a nutshell, is the gift received by those who allow themselves to be involved in a conversation in the Spirit." (IL n° 40)

It is not a matter of following this pattern slavishly. *'Rather it must always be adapted. Sometimes it is necessary to give priority to each one taking the floor and listening to the others; in other circumstances to*

bringing out the links between the different perspectives, in search of what makes "our hearts burn within us" (cf. Lk 24:32); in others still, to the explication of a consensus and working together to identify the direction in which one feels called by the Spirit to move.' (Cf. IL n° 41)

I find it very interesting what the document itself (IL) says about this method: *"In the local Churches, conversation in the Spirit has been accepted and sometimes "discovered" as providing the atmosphere that makes possible the sharing of life experiences and the space for discernment in a synodal Church."* (IL 2023, n° 34).

This "conversation in the Spirit" is not a proposal originating from the official organisation of the Synod, but was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the life of some particular Churches in a random but simultaneous way. It is therefore a fruit of the first steps of this synodal style, which the Holy Spirit himself seems to arouse for the life and mission of the Church in the third millennium. Today, this resource already appears in the material of the Synod of Bishops because it was also used during the Second Session in 2024.

Another charismatic reason for



with a conversation that may include confrontation and will continue to mature over time. It does not obsess about defining everything now and organising it now. It brings the inner impulses into dialogue with the objective instances offered by the Church and the environment (e.g., the signs of the times). It knows that the Spirit speaks in many ways, and that only the mystic knows it unfathomably.

- 7) **Decides** and focusses on action, avoiding useless dissipation of energy. It does not go round in circles or procrastinate, it has confidence to 'take the bull by the horns' with strength and courage.
- 8) **Takes responsibility** for the implementation of decisions, considering this process a missionary service to the Church and to the world of today towards specific recipients. It knows that

if he falters through negligence, real people with names and surnames will be harmed.

- 9) **Celebrates** with thanksgiving and gratitude, praising the Lord because He continues to do 'great things'. That is why it is important to recognize those great things 'in concrete', which usually mature and emerge from the paschal cross. In all cases, the celebration must be nourished by reality.
- 10) **Evaluates** periodically, because history is dynamic. Context, aims and challenges change, and everything undertaken can be improved. And one must beware the danger doing a kind of opportunistic 'pastoral football from the stands'. ■

Conversation in the Spirit • Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

“Conversation in the Spirit” or “spiritual conversation” is a method of community discernment that was officially used for the first time at the first session of the Synod on Synodality, held at the Vatican in October 2023, and at the second session, in October 2024. It is a method of spiritual discernment with which the members of the round tables (bringing together the various groups in the Paul VI Hall) used in their discussions.

This Conversation in the Spirit was presented for the first time in the synodal documents of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, for the first session of 2023, in numbers 32 to 42 of this document.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) describes the concrete development of this spiritual method as follows:

“Conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to communal discernment for which participants prepare themselves by personal reflection and meditation. They give each other the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot. The dynamic between the participants articulates three fundamental steps.” (IL 37)

“The first step is devoted to each person taking the floor, starting from his or her own experience reread in prayer during the period of preparation. Others listen in the knowledge that each one has a valuable contribution to offer and refrain from debates or discussions.” (IL 37)

“Silence and prayer help to prepare for the next step, in which each person is invited to open up within his or herself a space for others and for the Other. Once again, each person takes the floor: not to react to or counter what they have heard, reaffirming their own position, but to express what from their listening has touched them most deeply and what they feel challenged by most strongly. The interior traces that result from one’s listening to sisters and brothers are the language with which the Holy Spirit makes his own voice resound.” (IL 38)

“The third step, again in an atmosphere of prayer and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to identify the key points that have emerged and to build a consensus on the fruits of the joint work, which each person feels is faithful to the process and by which he or she can therefore feel represented.

The conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church



XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE SYNOD OF THE BISHOPS • FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION
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