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Nouvelles En Famille



The longed-for autonomy  
and ongoing discernment

## In this issue

The longed-for autonomy and ongoing discernment

– *Fr. Eduardo Gustavo Agín, Superior General*

PAG. 3

The poor are not recipients of our pastoral care...

– *Pope Leo XIV*

PAG. 7

Happy are the Poor

– *Fr. Tobia Sosio scj*

PAG. 8

Usage of Goods: What Possible “Faces”?

– *Fr. Giacomo Spini scj*

PAG. 11

To become a significant sign of poverty in the initial Formation

– *Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj*

PAG. 15

Warranties and safeguards in religious life

– *Fr. Osmar Cáceres scj*

PAG. 18

Financial Self-Sufficiency in the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam

– *Fr. Kriangsak Kitsakunwong scj*

PAG. 21

Towards Autonomy of the Ivory Coast Vicariate: A Concrete Approach

– *Fr. Christian Yao scj*

PAG. 23

Notices

– *General Council*

PAG. 26

Father Etchecopar's trips: first journey to Holy Land

– *Roberto Cornara*

PAG. 29

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# The longed-for autonomy and ongoing discernment

**“Father, give me the share of the inheritance that is due to me, so the Father divided his property between them” (Luke 15:12)**



Dear Betharramites,

This Gospel verse is found at the beginning of a beautiful story we all know well: that of the merciful Father with his sons, the younger and the older. Both were equally gifted, but they were, at the same time, lacking and needy within. Children of a Father who loved them and of a humanity marked by fragility, they lacked the lived experience of a God of Love in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, the beloved Son. The two brothers both wanted to be autonomous and independent, but without recognising hard reality and without discerning too much about the right path...

In touch with divine mercy, they would come to learn to take care of themselves, to always return to the Father's House, to value what they had, and to enter into the celebration of the feast, in communion with all. Both were lost and both were found.

Times in the Congregation change, but values remain. Autonomy, as in the parable, becomes a value when it is placed at the service of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It is about being freer to love more and love better, especially to love those who are discarded and forgotten, the excluded and the poor, those without a voice or acceptance, in an increasingly indifferent society.

The person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is our model. Though rich, he becomes poor to enrich us with his poverty; this is the root of his autonomy: *kenosis* (self-emptying). By an act of sovereign freedom, the Lord humbles himself and teaches us that, to be first, one must become a servant to all. His action is thus different from a natural desire to decide for oneself, or seek fulfilment at all costs, without external coercion and without subjection to others. His gesture is an invitation to ongoing discernment.

Saint Michael lived by this marvellous image. He lived in an era in which the principle of autonomy was becoming absolute, breeding what he called “the spirit of insubordination” (an unruly and rebellious spirit of revolution, not prophetic but sectarian). So the shepherd of Ibarre proposed the opposite: the “religious spirit,” founded on the great examples in Sacred Scripture in which the creature discovers the joy of obeying out of love for his Lord and Creator and throws himself unreservedly into His service.

He wanted consecrated persons to be free men and women like Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. To be humble, autonomous, and active like them, dynamic enough to run wherever they were invited to go. Docile to the promptings of the Spirit. Autonomy is thus a force that isn’t compromised when informed by a spiritual life.

At the last General Chapter in 2023, the question of autonomy arose, especially in the emerging vicariates. It was presented as a goal to be achieved in the coming years.

Article 204 of the Acts states:

*“The General Chapter became aware of the growing importance of emerging vicariates for the life of the Congregation. It thanks all the vicariates for the efforts made, both through the exchange of religious and through financial support, to allow them to advance toward greater autonomy. We also recognise and are aware of the progressive impoverishment of the original vicariates.”*

This is a challenge:

How can we live this desire for autonomy and reconcile it with faithfulness to our charism?



Well..... **by learning to constantly discern God's Will.** Otherwise, our so-called autonomy can be a great excuse to do what we want out of our own will!

For some years now, the Congregation has been committed to proposing the experience of the Spiritual Exercises to both young people in formation and also to the more experienced religious, in order to renew our covenant with the Loving God who has called us.

The Spiritual Exercises are an excellent school of prayer and discernment, but also a school of perseverance in the Life of the Spirit (of "resilience"). It is there that we can discover not only the Will of God, but also experience a greater (internal) knowledge of Jesus Christ that will invite us to choose Him and grow in a true, meaningful autonomy: *"to love Him more and follow Him."* This experience will lead us to *make good decisions*, and choose with more and more freedom what brings the greater Glory to God. It will free us from ourselves and from all disordered affections. Ultimately, autonomy cultivated and utilised in this way will bear fruit to the extent that we remain faithful to the goals we had set for ourselves, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, the autonomy to which a religious aspires is always related to the three vows they have professed. The vow of obedience in imitation of Christ is an invitation to act as consecrated persons who trust in the mediation of our older brothers, in the Church, in communion, and participation. It is never good to prioritise our personal interests over those of the Congregation (or the community). We must imagine our apostolic community project as the basis and stimulus for our personal project.

In matters of goods, autonomy is very healthy, but our vow of poverty requires us to live certain necessary attitudes: transparency, sobriety, sharing, and accepting dependence. The Chapter recalls this as follows:

*§205 | The General Chapter asks each religious of the emerging vicariates to take increasing care of the finances of their own vicariate, rigorously pooling the resources of their work and the gifts they have received.*

This does not compromise the autonomy of religious, because we Betharramites live in missionary communities, and the goods we have are at the service of mission, not of ourselves. We religious do not aspire to possess anything. We obtain everything through our work in the Church. What is given to us is to be

shared with our brothers and sisters.

In the end, we all tend to aspire to express our affection as we see fit, but through the vow of chastity, we have given ourselves to Jesus for the Kingdom, to be more free and available, to better serve all out of love. Therefore, we do not have an exclusive or excluding love, except that of the Lord. Our autonomy simultaneously and paradoxically expresses “*a loving dependence on Jesus Christ, humbled and obedient,*” who called us and set us apart from the flock so that we might be witnesses of the Kingdom.

Saint Michael lived this spirit throughout his life. We, fragile and sinful, cannot claim an autonomy that consists only of guiding ourselves with our own personal SatNav, without reflecting, praying, and deeply discerning the road to follow so that God’s Will may be present in our lives. This is how we have freely chosen to share the same happiness with others.

May God bless you all.

*In Corde Iesu.*

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**

Superior General

## **TO SHARE IN COMMUNITY:**

1. *Has your Vicariate discovered the need to live more autonomously? In what ways do you think this can help the good of the Congregation?*
2. *What risks and challenges does your Vicariate face today if it chooses to stand on its own two feet?*
3. *What discernment do you think is necessary to achieve a healthy autonomy?*



The poor are not recipients of our pastoral care, but creative subjects who challenge us to find novel ways of living out the Gospel today. In the face of new forms of impoverishment, we can risk becoming hardened and resigned. Each day we encounter poor or impoverished people. We too may have less than before and are losing what once seemed secure: a home, sufficient food for each day, access to healthcare and a good education, information, religious freedom and freedom of expression. In this promotion of the common good, our social responsibility is grounded in God's creative act, which gives everyone a share in the goods of the earth. Like those goods, the fruits of human labor should be equally accessible to all. Helping the poor is a matter of justice before a question of charity.

*Message of the Holy Father for the 9th World Day of the Poor  
given on June 13, 2025*

# Poverty and autonomy

## Happy are the Poor

• Fr. Tobia Sosio scj

During the week of the priestly jubilee, celebrated in Rome under the theme «Joyful Priests,» I found myself reflecting on the meaning of the vow of poverty and wondering whether or not that distant commitment (this year marks the 60th anniversary of my first profession) contributed to my happiness.

For Jesus Christ, the first beatitude is “*Happy are the poor*” (Matt 5.3) and also the first stern warning is “*But woe to you who are rich!*” (Luke 6.24) Faith has motivated our profession, and life experience has confirmed it: the commitment to own nothing (Rule of Life 49) does not embitter life, but rather fully fulfils. I always admired Mujica, the former Uruguayan president, who, in his professed atheism and renowned wisdom, affirmed that “*with technological advances, people no longer have time to talk to each other*” and concluded that “*if you walk through life lighter, you are freer.*”

What kind of happiness does poverty give us? Evangelical poverty, quite distinct from misery, helps us, above all, **to be happy with ourselves**. Consumerism enslaves us, making us dependent on the latest novelties offered by the market. Little by little, we become dissatisfied, because what the market offers is short-lived. Only a courageous attitude of renunciation «of possessing» can guarantee us a better quality of life.

**“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35): Jesus’ teaching, echoed by Saint Paul, is difficult to understand and practice if we are overly concerned with having. We constantly see that the most generous people are those who possess the least. Generous in sharing their possessions and also generous in sharing their time. Isn’t consumerism perhaps one of the causes of the scarcity of vocations? By the vow of poverty, we share our material





goods, our human and spiritual values (RV 49). *"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*: we don't have to wait for the afterlife to experience love and brotherhood among us. How many couples have serious problems living together, and parents with their children, because they can't put down their cell phones for a few moments!

***"We want to be close to and supportive of the poor"***: situations of poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability are everywhere, and are even more evident in a capitalist and consumerist economy: *"The globalization of indifference has taken away our capacity to weep,"* Pope Francis stated

on several occasions on the island of Lampedusa, striking the conscience of wealthy countries. But he also told religious: *"A poor consecrated life is a life rich in God and open to others."* Happiness is a question of love: it is so beautiful to see the joy of volunteer groups or the various services, in parishes, in missions, and in society. *"A happy priest is the best proclamation of the Gospel,"* Cardinal You affirmed, in the context of the priestly jubilee. *"You must not take bread or provisions or money"* (Luke 6:8), Jesus told the missionary disciples, and they returned very happy (Luke 6:30).



***“The sharing of goods is a sign for the Church and for the world”:*** never before has it been more evident that consumerism is the greatest evil for the environment, and perhaps religious life, lived with simplicity and a spirit of solidarity, a great contribution to the health of our Common Home.

*“Sober, light of baggage, so that things do not take away my freedom”:* former President Mujica said and lived it, although he did not take the vow of poverty, but has certainly been a shining sign, not only for politicians, but also for the people of our time. *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis’ second encyclical, is a beautiful roadmap for us religious, an appeal

to the younger generations, who are most interested in the health of our environment.

*“I thought I was someone important. I, who had tended my mother’s flocks and lived poorly, let myself be carried away by affectation and adorned myself with elegant footwear—boots or shoes with buckles—to replace my shepherd’s clogs. This was my state of mind when the opportunity arose to meet the Good Sister. Seeing the holiness of that elite soul, her religious life, her poverty, I reflected and realized I had missed the path.”* The shock is harsh but very effective. Shortly afterward, he wrote: *“I have nothing but my breviary, my Bible, and my theology, and*





*I have never felt happier than today. The closer I come to my origins, to my former nakedness, the happier I am.*” Saint Michael Garicoïts, a saint not only for his Here I Am, but also

for his resolute choice for poverty: in fact, it will be very difficult, almost impossible, to say “*here I am*” with a heart tied to fleeting goods. ■

## Usage of Goods: What Possible “Faces”?

• Fr. Giacomo Spini scj

Lissone-Castellazzo Community

I received the proposal that came to me, with hesitation and completely unexpectedly, on the day of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, which was also the closing day of our parish summer camp. The request was for a testimo-

nial article on the topic: “What is your personal relationship with money? (both as an individual religious and as a superior of a community, or as a pastor of a parish...)”.

I confess that my first reaction was to



decline the proposal, having just completed three intense weeks of oratory with the children: from 7:30 in the morning to 6:00 in the evening, and on many nights staying late with the youth leaders and open-air movie nights.

But then the Word of St. Paul from the second reading at the Mass of the Sacred Heart struck me: *"God's love has been poured into our hearts"* (Rom 5:5). It made me reflect deeply. It was the Word I shared with the children during our prayer time, and later that evening in my farewell message to the kids and their parents at the end

of the summer camp celebration. I told them that if God's love has been poured into our hearts, then we are all capable of loving, and this is the concrete path open to us all.

And so, I began to think that saying "yes" to this proposal was a concrete way in which I was being asked to love.

Since I'm being asked to offer a personal experience regarding poverty and the use of goods, I began reflecting on the journey of my life. And I must say, everything is rooted in the family in which I grew up, where we had to be content with few resources and learned to find joy in the small



things. In my family, I learned what it means to live with limited means, but also the value of sharing with siblings and parents, and gradually taking on responsibilities as we grew.

From my family, I also learned the value of work and money: the importance of making commitments and carrying it through with responsibility. I spent the summers from age 9 to 12 as a shepherd in the mountains, not at home, but under an employer. It was a tough life, full of work, effort, and discipline, but I still see it as a formative time.

When I entered Albavilla, I found living conditions far better than those of my family, and this made me appreciate and value what I had at my disposal.

During the novitiate, my university years, and later as a superior in Monte Porzio, where we had a thriving agricultural business, I found an environment where there was no lack of work and opportunities to dedicate oneself. And in this, I saw a concrete way to live out "poverty".

Yes, I have always given priority to the vow of poverty in terms of taking responsibility to earn one's daily bread. Moreover, I have always understood religious poverty as the sharing of goods, and thus a reality to be lived in community evaluating and deciding together, avoiding individualism, au-

tonomy, and independence.

Another aspect I've tried to prioritize is being available to those less fortunate than us and living in situations of poverty and hardship on many levels. I remember the years I spent accompanying two communities with about twenty young Africans in collaboration with the association La Tenda di Abramo in Sala Baganza. This was during the first wave of non-European immigrants arriving in Parma - people who found work easily but struggled to find housing.

Years later, after a time in Rome as Vicar General, I returned to Parma and was given the role of spiritual guide at the Centro di Aiuto alla Vita (Life Assistance Center), along with responsibility for family ministry. There, I encountered a hidden world of poverty and need within the rich and beautiful city of Parma, a variety of situations of poverty that required welcoming, listening, accompaniment, and support. So many mothers, both Italian and foreign, with small children; each one with her own story of poverty, suffering, and in need of someone to offer a point of reference to help them find hope again on life's journey.

In the context where I now live in Lissone, there are many and varied situations of need and poverty to welcome



and accompany: I especially think of the sick and the lonely, but also those grieving the loss of a loved one.

Beyond this personal dimension, I always try to pay attention to the community and apostolic dimension. That means taking care of the religious community and the parish setting - not only pastorally, by witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel - but also practically: ensuring that facilities are maintained, managing money and community goods responsibly and wisely, with complete transparency, and regularly reporting on the financial and administrative situation to both the religious community and the parish community.

Our Rule of Life reminds us and guides us on how to live this evangelical counsel of poverty, both personally and as a community.

How beautiful is the passage at the beginning of Chapter III of the Rule of Life:

*"Jesus Christ is our mirror, our example that we must never lose sight of: His life, His actions, His interior and exterior way of life. Let us compare ourselves continually with Him; is my heart like His? At this moment what would He do? Yes, He alone is my life."*

But I want to conclude by pointing to

an article that I found very enlightening on this subject, though it's from a few years ago, titled: "The Beautiful Faces of Religious Poverty" by Rino Cozza, CSJ («Testimoni», Issue 18, 2012).

Here are the "faces" the author highlights:

**The face of fraternity**

**The face of simplicity**

**The face of gentleness**

**The face of diakonia (service)**

**The face of apostolic effectiveness**

These, to me, seem like the characteristics through which to live the evangelical counsel of poverty. They are the criteria by which to manage money and goods according to the way of communal sharing, in both community life and mission.

The author ends his article quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar, who said:

*"One cannot be rich in God unless one is willing to share in His divine poverty." ■*

## To become a significant sign of poverty in the initial Formation

• Fr. Stervin Selvadass,

Councillor General for formation scj

**Last year, the Congregation organized a formation session for all formators in Betharram, held from July 1st to July 6th. The animator of the session affirmed the quality of our current formation documents—particularly the *Ratio Formationis* (Formation Guide)—recognizing them as thoughtfully prepared, deeply meaningful, and rich in conviction.**

I remember how he challenged us not to keep them as theoretical ideals but to make them operational and practical with fidelity and creativity. Yes, he created a desire and a thirst to dive deeper into our own documents especially our formation guide where we find the “Betharramite Style of Formation for Today”. It is from here once again I begin.

Our *Ratio Formationis* (Formation Guide) emphasis clearly the aspect of valuing the money and about the use of money during the formation from the moment of postulancy till the end of initial formation.

- In the postulancy, the formators educate the postulants to “take account of the economic investment of the congregation in one’s formation, and helps them in order to accept and live a modest & sharing life style” (RF 168, d).
- In the Novitiate, the novice is asked “to learn to manage the money and the goods at the disposition of each one, and to give account” (RF 188, g).
- As a Scholastic, he is formed to be “responsible for the material and financial welfare of the community” (RF 209, d).

I appreciate the 3 ways by which the education on valuing and using of money and goods are explained in the three stages of initial formation. What a wisdom of our elder brothers who so beautifully drafted and brought out the elements step by step. I am sure that all the formators in their respective formation houses take these aspects seriously and impart them to their formees.

[illegible]

*Giving account? A perennial requirement.*

*Excerpt from the accounting book of the Sarrance community (France) in the year 1869. "Cash Balance as of December 1st: 1,839.40 francs"*

(Rome Archives)



We cannot deny that the young people during their formation are faithful to follow their program and projects. Everything looks different, everything is shaped by wider, more generous, more spiritual horizons. But at the same time, in the recent days, we hear more and more frequently people say that there is a "disconnect" in the life of the young religious. It is to say that in some cases, they are not the same after their initial formation: something is changed... something is changed particularly in the aspect of valuing money and the usage of it.

This may be the reason why the 28th General Chapter held in Thailand reminded the formators to give novices and scholastics a systematic formation in this spirit of accountability and clarity of accounts, sharing and solidarity (Acts of the 28th GC, § 155, c). Our father St. Michael Garicoits long ago said, *"nothing paralyzes the priest's ministry like attachment to money"* (DS 330).

Why is it so? Is it because of less awareness of what they were convinced of in their formation? Is it because the world's attraction is so powerful? Is it because of the spirit careerism? We can,

of course, continue to explore but the point is that what could be done better in the initial formation?

1. First of all, I insist on applying the method (as I said above) proposed in *Ratio* concretely, creatively and consistently in each stage of our formation
2. Secondly, there are certain convictions articulated so well in the General Chapter in 2023; *"we commit ourselves to own nothing; we hold in common all our material goods, our human and spiritual possessions and we express this style of life proper to us. We consciously use the goods of the community insofar as they are necessary for mission. Thus, we become a sign of evangelical life in the world"* (RoL, 49-52) (Acts of the 28th GC, § 148-151). These convictions must be made practical and lived by all particularly in the initial formation.
3. Thirdly, the world is more and more into the culture of waste, of consumption and of accumulation. There is a greater tendency to spend and spend more even if there is no use of it. Hence, the formator could be watchful that

there is no education to spend rather they educate to use money and the goods emphasizing on responsibility, accountability and transparency. It is why the General Chapter held in Paraguay in 2017 also renewed its call to, *"educate to give clear accounting is a habit that must begin with the initiatives in the house of formation and contin-*

*ue for all life"* (Acts of the 27th GC, § 48).

Following the example of our founder & father St. Michael Garicoits, everyone is invited to live the style of life proposed by our rule of life in order to become a significant sign of poverty. ■

## Warranties and safeguards in religious life

• Fr. Osmar Cáceres scj  
Novice Master

### **In what way do young people in formation become aware of the guarantees of religious life that others are deprived of?**

When a young person arrives at the formation house, the first thing they notice is the enormous difference between the lifestyle they had in their family of origin and the one they discover here. This is the first way they become aware of the few guarantees available in the outside world and the many guarantees found within religious life.

In the Region of Fr. Auguste Etchéco-par, the formation houses are similar in terms of the guarantees they offer: they are large houses with green spaces; individual rooms, a kitchen employee, laundry and ironing services, private medical insurance (which ensures quick access to care), studies at private institutions under privileged conditions, with the possibility of getting to a study centre by private car, etc.

Any young person in formation who benefits from these privileges will





*The Adrogué community, which houses the regional novitiate for the Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region, is nearly at full strength: (from left to right) Fr. Constancio Erobal, Fr. Osmar Cáceres, Br. Wesllem Palacios (1st-year novice), Fr. Francisco Daleoso. The two 2nd-year novices, Osvaldo and Fredy, are currently gaining pastoral experience in Brazil. Rounding out the community is Fr. Davi Lara, the Regional Superior.*

realize that this is not the case in the outside world: they know, either from personal experience or from what they see around them, that most ordinary people who work for a someone else, generally use public transport, buy tickets, pay for their own studies, meals, rent, and all other services, in addition to running the risk of losing their job due to the uncertainties of the labour market.

Are these issues of guarantees (social security, housing, use of money) discussed in the formation house?

As a formation community at the Regional Novitiate, we always strive to ensure that the novices become aware of these issues and experience them. We focus on these matters especially when we develop a community project and also when we study the Rule of Life with them. In addition, during the personalized accompaniment process, these themes are discussed and worked on individually with each novice. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are effective tools used to awaken greater awareness in the novices and, above all,

to promote a conversion of heart towards the practice of evangelical counsels. Moreover, in the lessons at the Saint Thomas Spirituality Centre—particularly during the intensive sessions on poverty—these topics are addressed.

We also try to help the novices live more simply in concrete ways. For example: they do not have private health insurance and, in case of illness, they have to go to a public hospital in the area like any other citizen; they generally use the bus, train, and metro to get to their classes; they participate in volunteer work receiving donations of clothing and food to distribute to the most underprivileged families in the neighbour-

hood; in their pastoral activities, they are in constant contact with vulnerable individuals and the poor, practising solidarity and sharing their goods with those most in need. All the religious in the house share their income and give an account of the goods they use. We help the novices learn to request funding and give an account of their use of money. As a formation community, we try to make the best use of the available resources and we cooperate so that the laypeople who work with us in pastoral work also learn to value the space and participate in good stewardship of the resources we have.

The real challenge is not to become attached to the guarantees from



which we, religious and those in formation, benefit, but to use them as opportunities, "insofar as" they help us fully better achieve our goal and fulfil our mission.

It is never useless to revisit these themes of guarantees available in community formation settings and to reflect on them. It may happen that,

over the years, we forget the values we planned to live by in this respect, or that we do not give them much importance, or simply that we never fully integrated them in our lives. ■

## Financial Self-Sufficiency in the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam

• Fr. Kriangsak Kitsakunwong scj,  
Regional Vicar

In community life we manifest *"the sentiments of charity, humility, gentleness, obedience, devotedness contained in that first act of the Sacred Heart: Ecce Venio!"* (DS 44)

We are proud to affirm that the growth of our Vicariate is a true blessing and expression of God's will. As St. Michael Garicoïts said, *"Deus meus et omnia – My God, my all."* Without God, we are nothing. The continued existence of our Vicariate is possible thanks to the steadfast support of the Congregation (Generalate). The charism of our Founder continues to flourish in our Vicariate, rooted in a foundation laid and lovingly nurtured by Betharramite

missionaries. Our journey has always been strengthened by the generosity of our benefactors.

This is the current reality of our Vicariate: we are deeply aware that our existence and mission are the result of God's mercy and the generous support of the congregation and our benefactors. It is through these blessings that we are enabled to remain faithful to our Betharramite religious identity and to our missionary commitments.

The best way to respond to these blessings is through responsible co-operation. This begins with a sincere self-reflection and a renewed sense of

self-belonging. We recognize our reality and our capacities as a Vicariate, as religious of Betharram, and as missionaries. Therefore, we have made it a priority to cultivate this sense of self-belonging throughout our Vicariate—from the formation house to every member of the Vicariate.

We are committed to practicing frugality and using only what is necessary. In our efforts toward financial self-sufficiency, we have implemented several practices that reflect our shared responsibility.

### **Concrete Sharing of Mission & Financial Responsibility in the Vicariate**

We organize our support efforts on three levels: personal, community, and Vicariate level.

#### **1. Personal Level**

Each member is asked to help the Vicariate according to the gifts or talents that they are. Each Betharramite has known different benefactors, so they encourage them to support our Vicariate.

#### **2. Community Level**

Every community contributes financially to the Vicariate every month. Communities may also provide other forms of support to the Vicariate depending on their

capacity. For example, rice, fruits, vegetables for our formation houses. Each time we have our Vicariate meeting we share what we have in our community and parish to our Vicariate House.

#### **3. Vicariate Level**

We receive a monthly allocation of 5,000 Thai Baht for each religious from diocesan pastoral support (Chiangmai and Chiangrai dioceses). This amount is used to cover Vicariate-related expenses.

In this way the Vicariate makes regular financial contributions to: Phayao Seminary, Sampran Seminary, Vicariate House in Chiang Mai, Community in Vietnam (for a future project of Vietnam and rental of house) and the Betharram Foundation Chomthong. These contributions are part of our shared mission and demonstrate our commitment to mutual support and solidarity within the Betharramite family.

In our formation houses, we invite parents to cooperate in supporting the daily expenses of their children to our formation house. Alternatively they can support their children in various ways according to their capacities. Some may not have money but send rice or vegetables or fruit to our formation houses. Although the contri-

butions are modest, they are valuable in forming both the students and their parents in the spirit of co-responsibility and belonging.

We are committed to continuing our efforts to support and sustain our Vicariate. This commitment reflects our willingness to contribute and our sense of responsibility. We also express our sincere gratitude to the rest of the Congregation for their continued support, particularly in covering the education fees for our formation houses in Sampran and Ban Garicoits, as well as for the overall expenses of our community in Vietnam.

According to our plan we need to continue and practice what we are doing in our Vicariate. From now on we will be developing self-awareness

and a greater sense of belonging. We will continue to keep an attitude of fraternal communion as Betharramite religious in our Vicariate. We will continue to 'Be open', to 'Arise' and to 'Walk together' as pilgrims of hope.

As Betharramite religious in the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam, we look back on our past as filled with blessings and graces of God. Our heartfelt thanks to the Congregation, to the Betharramite missionaries and all benefactors both known and unknown. We will live our present life with sincerity, faithful to our calling as Betharramite religious with an increase of self-awareness and sense of belonging. And we will continue to walk together in fraternity with love and hope in the will of God.



## Towards Autonomy of the Ivory Coast Vicariate: A Concrete Approach

• Fr. Christian Yao scj,

Bursar of the Ivory Coast Vicariate

**In accordance with the recommendations of the General Chapter (§§ 204-208) inviting young vicariates to undertake concrete**

**actions to promote their financial self-sufficiency, the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire has engaged in in-depth reflection and implemented**



### various initiatives.

We express our gratitude to our elders, our superiors, and the vicariates who have worked tirelessly to promote the self-sufficiency of our young community. All the initiatives already undertaken are invaluable. As religious of the Vicariate, we are fully aware of the urgent need for this financial autonomy for emerging vicariates, which is essential to the communion of sharing within our Congregation.

During a meeting of perpetually professed members, teams of reflection were formed to propose projects to support the Vicariate's finances. Several ideas emerged, and a committee, led by the vicariate's bursar, was tasked with bringing the most promising ones to fruition.

These short-, medium-, and long-term projects are diverse and strive to meet the various needs of the local population. These initiatives include: the construction of small shops to provide accessible commercial spaces for people with limited means; the establishment of a gas cylinder sales point to facilitate the supply of fuel to families in difficulty; the acquisi-

tion of a public address system for rental, given strong local demand; a banana plantation in Adzopé on the newly acquired land; and the development of food crops at Km 50, in partnership with the Tshanféto farm, recognizing the potential and national reputation of agriculture. Improved monitoring of rubber plantations to optimize production, and a project to purchase a rubber harvesting truck, aimed at reducing vehicle rental costs and generating additional income by leasing it to other merchants. The Adiapodoumé car wash, after undergoing upgrades, generates profits that are fully allocated to the formation house. Similarly, other past projects, such as the Adiapodoumé guest house, are now generating a decent profit margin.

We are particularly grateful for the commitment of our brothers and sisters who, by soliciting the generous help of friends and acquaintances, contribute to the success of these projects for the common good.

Furthermore, various actions and projects are carried out within the communities, not only for their own autonomy, but above all to support the Vicariate in its quest



for financial independence. The communities' contributions to the Vicariate's coffers are now regular, with each community providing its financial or material support in a spirit of the economy of communion. However, we are aware of the significant financial investments required to implement all these projects within our young Vicariate. This is why we are engaging in a borrowing process to enable the implementation of some of them. We would like to emphasize that the Adiapodoumé Retail Project is the result of the invaluable assistance of the Vicariate of Italy, to whom we extend our most sin-

cere thanks. We are also currently considering how to make our land more profitable.

This is a glimpse of the concrete reality of our Vicariate as it moves toward autonomy. To achieve this, we have adopted a clear policy, supported by Father Simone, our Regional Superior. We strive to operate in a climate of trust, sharing, and mutual support, in order to work and manage the assets entrusted to us with rigor and clarity, and to practice charity within the limits of our mission.

Thank you, and always onwards!





**Ordinations to priesthood of Deacons  
Nicholas Surasak Doohae SCJ and  
John Weerapong Youhae SCJ**

On June 28, in Chiang Mai Cathedral, on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a solemn concelebration took place, presided over by the Bishop of the Diocese of Chiang Rai, Mgr. Joseph Vuthilert Haelom.

During the celebration, four new priests were ordained. Among them were two of our Betharramite brothers:

**Nicholas Surasak DOOHAE SCJ  
John Weerapong YOUHAE SCJ**

Many faithful joined the celebration on this joyous occasion.

**United in prayer and joy for  
all our brothers**





### Priestly Ordinations in Yopougon (Ivory Coast)

**Salomon BANDAMA scj**  
**Aurélien Emeric KOUAMÉ scj**

Our confreres were ordained priests by Mons. Lezoutié on Saturday, July 12 in the cathedral of Yopougon.

### Final professions in Adiapodoumé

On July 13 in Adiapodoumé **Br. Kouamé Toussaint Tah, Br. Constant Cheghe Kouaho, Br Fabian Charles Mahan Koui and Br. Eric Touré** made their final profession. The perpetual vows were received by the Regional Superior, Fr. Simone Panzeri scj, delegate of the Superior General.



### Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region

- In the session of the General Council on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has appointed

**Fr. Jose Kumar JOHNROSE,**  
as Regional Vicar in India,

for a first term from July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, in accordance with the Rule of Life (articles 205 and 248) and the recommendations of the General Chapter 2023 (§ 103).

- In the extraordinary session of July 10<sup>th</sup>, the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, decided to present:

**Br. Anselm Prapas**  
**CHIWAKITMANKONG**  
&  
**Br. Peter DO VAN Hung**

of the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam to the **diaconal ministry**. The ceremony will take place on August 9th at the Lux Mundi Seminary (Sampran).

### In memoriam

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**Italy** | *Mrs Maria Vimercati*, mother of the late Fr. Massimo Motta scj, our brother who died of Covid-19 in 2021, returned to the Father's house. May the merciful Lord welcome her into his home and make her share in the joy he gives to his friends.

**India** | It is with deep sorrow that we inform you of the passing away of *Mr. Thomas Antony Kuttappasery*, the elder brother of Fr. Yesudas Kuttappasery SCJ, on 4th July 2025 due to illness. He was 46 years old. Let us unite in prayer for the repose of his soul and for strength and consolation for Fr. Yesudas and his family during this time of grief.



## First journey to Holy Land

December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1890 – April 30<sup>th</sup> 1891

This journey is the beginning of a real “feat of strength” for Father Etchecopar. In fact between December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1890 to June 11<sup>th</sup> 1893 he will undertake two journeys in Holy Land one in Rome (the 7<sup>th</sup>) and another one in South America to visit the communities in Argentina and Uruguay. If we briefly calculate, upon the 921 days included between these two dates, Fr. Etchecopar was away from Betharram during more than 600 days.

In his letters he expresses many times his wish to undertake a pilgrimage in Holy Land to attend the foundation of Bethlehem Carmel (1875) or the one of the Betharramite residence (1879)<sup>1</sup>. But it is the military law of 1889 which will at last give him the opportunity to go there: the article 50 foresaw that during peace time, a young person who left France

before 19 years old and stayed away in a foreign country until his thirty years old was exempted of military service. In September and October 1890, the General Council decided to use this article sending young people to foreign countries while in formation: a noviciate in Buenos Aires and a scholasticate in Bethlehem are founded; Fr. Etchecopar would like to attend the foundation of this scholasticate. Thus his first trip in Holy Land.

This is a very happy period because his health allows him to travel. The departure from Betharram is scheduled December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1890 in the morning. Fr. Jean Bergez, appointed teacher in the scholasticate and two other young seminarians, Charles Larraillet and Hippolyte Loste-Salle<sup>2</sup>, are part of the journey.

We don't know precisely all the

1) Cf. *Letters of June 18 and September 14, 1878.*

2) On December 20<sup>th</sup>, two more seminarians, Jean-Baptiste Hontaa and Louis Arriulou, will depart. In March 1891, a fifth seminarian, Eustache Encasteing, will join his companions: these are the first five scholastics of Bethlehem.

stages of the journey which only lasted thirteen days. They embarked in Marseille on December 6th and arrived in Bethlehem in the afternoon of December 16th. *"After having easily and quickly overcome the first navigation after two days of resting in Alexandria and a stop in Port Saïd, we landed in Jaffa with a very smooth sea. There a carriage was waiting for us and took us to Bethlehem where we arrived yesterday afternoon."*<sup>3</sup> The first days are devoted to visits of courtesy to the patriarch of Jerusalem and French Consulate. On December 25th he has the joy to celebrate the Christmas mass in the basilique of the Nativity and the next day he is in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of St Etienne. He accomplished many other pilgrimages in Jerusalem to visit and pray in the holy places : *"As for me I am privileged so far thanks to your prayers. Thus as time flies, the morning elapses for me to pray, to read some readings about Holy Scripture or a book of pity: the evening celebrating the office, to take a walk near Jerusalem or on the road to Hebron... Father Médebielle is my guide and my cicerone in my*

*day walks."*<sup>4</sup> But above all his time is dedicated to the community and to the scholastics of Bethlehem for whom he wrote little rules written by his own hands and kept in Rome archives.

While he was in Bethlehem the ordinary process about the writing of Fr. Garicoits come to an end in France. The authenticated copies are ready to be sent in Rome to the Congregation of the Cause of the Saints, but Fr Etchecopar wants this writings to be taken first to Bethlehem: *"These so glorious pieces will be put into the crib and to the tomb of Our Lord before being given to the Pope."*<sup>5</sup> It will be Fr. Miro, Vice Postulator of the Cause of the Founder who will bring these texts in Bethlehem.

His pilgrimage is also an opportunity to pray and to think about the spirituality of the founder. *"It is a great comfort for me to be at the very source where so many singular favours come from on our Congregation especially the spirit of humility, of simplicity, obedience and love which were the characteristic*

3) Letter of December 17, 1890

4) Letter of January 26, 1891.

5) Letter of March 17, 1891.

*features of Fr. Garicoits and he has imprinted on his work; thus hours, days, weeks elapse so fast, looking towards the Nativity scene and to the Calvary thanking and praising the Lord.”*<sup>6</sup>

With Fr. Medebielle, he spent all the Holy Week in Jerusalem, a guest of the Franciscans in Casa Nova, to closely follow all the ceremonies from the Palm Sunday to the Easter Sunday in the very places where they were born. On the Holy Thursday he was chosen among the 12 persons for the foot washing in the Holy Sepulchre.

His coming back to Europe is expected for the month of April. But before that he has the opportunity of visiting two other important places. On the 11th of April he thanked the community with which he could “for four months taste peacefully the heavenly delights of the Holy Places”.<sup>7</sup> He left for Emmaus, where he is hosted by the Trappists of Latroun where he visited the ruins of byzantine time and crusade times and the property which was bought by Berthe Dartigaux on indication of Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified. On a boat taken in Jaffa he arrives

in Haïfa on April 13th where he is welcomed by the Carmelitans. The next day he celebrates mass on the mount Carmel and in the evening he arrives in Nazareth. Here the Carmelites of Bethlehem owned land on which later the Carmel and the Betharramite residence will rise. He visits Nazareth; he celebrates mass in the basilique of the Annunciation and visits also Cana.

On April 18th he is back to Jaffa where he stays four days. On the 22nd a ship takes him back to Europe, not before stopping a few days in Alexandria of Egypt and visiting Cairo and Matarieh (place which according to the tradition had welcomed the Holy Family during its escape to Egypt). On April 30th in the evening he disembarks in Marseille. However he doesn't return to Betharram because he has something important to do in Rome.

*Roberto Cornara*

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6) Letter of January 5, 1891.

7) Letter of April 11, 1891.

“

Mary, you are full of grace,  
and you fill us all with grace: what joy!

You did not seek to be saved alone or with a few others,  
but you wanted us all to be saved: what joy!

Because of this, we turn to you  
so that we may be saved.

O Mary, you who are filled with light,  
enlighten us all!

”

*From the collection of prayers "Forward!" by Fr. Beñat Oyhenart SCJ,  
inspired by the Spiritual Doctrine of Saint Michael Garicoits*



Societas Sacratissimi  
Cordis Jesu

*Beñat Oyhenart*