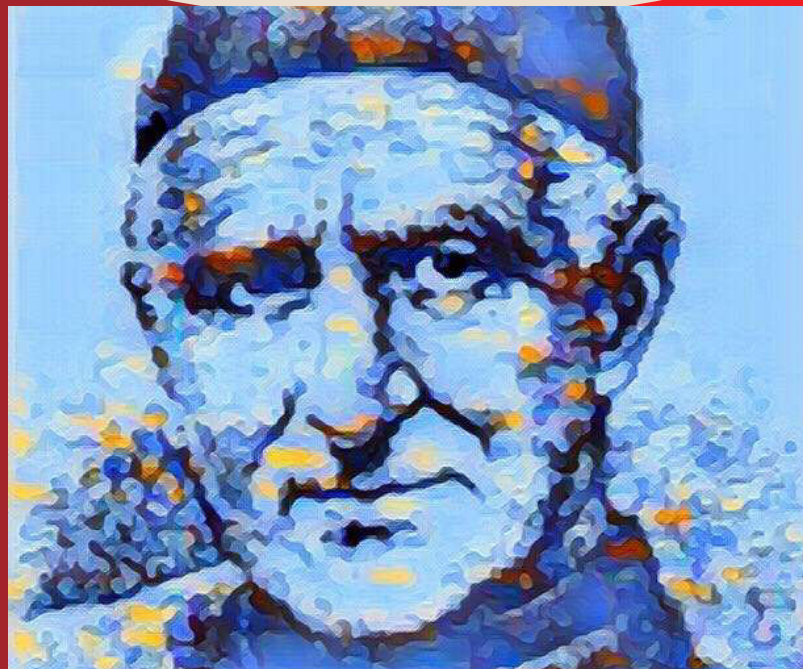


“ He who wishes to find Jesus Christ must rip from his heart the obstacles, the bias and all uncontrolled affections. He must have positive dispositions, I mean love of humiliations, of poverty, of the Cross, where we are assured we can always find Jesus Christ. ”

Saint Michael Garicoits (Spiritual Doctrine § 16)



Societas Sacratissimi
Cordis Jesu

Bethmann



Nef

2025

Nouvelles En Famille



The Heart is the locus of
sincerity



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FOR INTERNAL USE

say so, the flower of the original spirit, we compiled a collection of our customs and practices." ⁴

February-March 1889

When everything was ready, Fr. Etchécopar, again accompanied by Fr. Victor Bourdenne, set off once more for Rome on 25th February 1889. *"Praised and approved by the Holy See, as you know, our dear Institute has not yet received the formal approval of its Constitutions... The time has come to take the necessary steps."* ⁵

In Rome, the work awaiting the two Fathers was intense and would give them no rest. Further changes were introduced, as documented by extensive correspondence between Fr. Etchécopar and the other members of the General Council in Betharram. This considerably extended their stay in Rome. *"We are happy to be here to compile the entire file and present it to our Superiors as they see fit... Only the distance separating us causes delays. Help us shorten*

them as much as possible." ⁶

Around 17th March, the file was submitted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

This trip also aimed to submit to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints the file of testimonial letters written by bishops and notable figures, to request the introduction of the Founder's cause. ⁷

After the audience with the Pope (17th March) and a pilgrimage to Loreto (March 17-20), Fathers Etchécopar and Bourdenne returned to France on 26th March.

On 28th April 1890, Pope Leo XIII promulgated the decree approving the Constitutions—not definitively, as Fr. Etchécopar had hoped, but *ad decennium* (for ten years). The definitive approval did not come until 6th September 1901.

Roberto Cornara

⁴) Report to the General Chapter of 1890.

⁵) Circular letter of 18th February 1889.

⁶) Letter to Fr. Quillahuquy, SCJ, 11th March 1889.

⁷) Cf. Circular letter of 15th March 1889.

The two travellers left for Rome around mid-February 1887 and were hosted at the French Seminary near the Church of Saint-Louis-des-Français. "We have matters concerning the Congregation," he wrote to his sister Madeleine, "and then there's Rome to see! If only we had eyes for it—but my dear assistant, Fr. Bourdenne, will see enough for both of us."¹ The trip also included an audience with Pope Leo XIII, but due to the death of a cardinal and two consistories, the audience was delayed several days. This extended the stay of Fathers Etchécopar and Bourdenne beyond what was planned. It was only late in the afternoon of 20th March that he was received by the Supreme Pontiff², and the next day, the two men left for Bétharram.

At the General Chapter at the end of August 1887, Fr. Etchécopar presented a report on the trip and the information he had gathered. The Chapter finally approved the following motion: "The Chapter requests the Superior General and his Council to seek as soon as possible from the Sacred

Congregation of Bishops and Regulars the canonical approval of our Constitutions."

Fr. Etchécopar then set to work revising the Constitutions, making the necessary changes, and adding what was missing, following the indications of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Fr. Duvignau writes: "The changes requested were fewer than in 1877. The second part, titled 'Way of Life,' was essentially split in two: the first section dealt with the vows, and the second detailed the practice of the corresponding virtues. The chapter titled 'Particular Devotions of the Institute' was again reduced to three paragraphs..."³ A new Customary was written at the same time as the Constitutions. Fr. Etchécopar attached great importance to it: "The Customary applies the Constitutions to the details of daily life; it specifies their scope, breadth, spirit, and unique character. Given this close relationship and the importance of this Customary among us to define the natural features of our Fathers and to preserve, if I may

THE HEART IS THE LOCUS OF SINCERITY

As pilgrims journeying from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh

"Nothing is more devious than the human heart: it is beyond cure: who can fathom it? I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the inmost being, to give to each person according to his conduct, and according to the fruit of his deeds." (Jer 17:9-10)

Dear Betharramites,

Reading, meditating on, and praying with the founding text (Manifesto) is like looking into our own hearts. Its profoundly Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesiological lines reveal the primary intuition of our Founder, Saint Michael Garicoits (the one that Father Leblanc SJ advised him to follow after his Spiritual Exercises in 1830). Our vocation and mission as religious and lay people of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are at stake there, in having had the experience of knowing (in the biblical sense), loving, and closely following that self-effacing and obedient Jesus Christ, and seeking the same happiness for others. It is the encounter with the Heart of Jesus, "the sweetest of all hearts" (Fr. Etchecopar).

Jesus was always willing to do the will of his Father; from the beginning of his life, he walked the walk inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of his Father. He never wanted to act on his own, or "cut himself off." When we Betharramites live our consecration and mission from this choice like Jesus Christ, moved



1) Letter of 19th February 1887.

2) Cf. Circular letter of 30th March 1887.

3) Short History of the Constitutions of Bétharram

by his passionate style of serving humanity—represented in the manifesto as “taking the place of all the victims”—then our vocation flourishes, bears fruit, and spreads... We become credible signs of that love of God, which generously impels us to serve as true children, free from ties, expecting nothing in return. Dedicated and obedient, we place ourselves totally at the service of the Church, inserting ourselves as *joyful auxiliaries*, never worrying about obtaining titles, positions, or honours.

When, on the contrary, we fail to do so, *our dark side* emerges within us; that which takes shape as *a heart of stone*, in a “spirit of insubordination” (SMG), in our indifference and stubborn disobedience. In short, evoking the founding text: it is to be “*like ice before God*,” and “*even found among priests*” (so SMG says)....

Because it is from the depths of the heart that everything comes. As Jesus said: “*A good man brings forth good out of the treasure of goodness in his heart. An evil man brings forth evil out of wickedness, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.*” (Luke 6:45)

How hard it is to practise what we preach! There is a very interesting passage in *Dilexit nos* (DN) in this regard, when it invites us to be authentic and not false: “*At the same time, the heart is the place of sincerity, where one cannot deceive or dissemble. It usually indicates one’s true intentions, what one truly thinks, believes, and wants, the ‘secrets’ one tells no one, and, ultimately, one’s own naked truth. It is about that which is not appearance or imitation but authentic, real, entirely ‘one’s true self’*” (DN 5).

We Betharramites today live amidst a great paradox that expresses the complexity of the Heart. Certain works and people who seemed worthy of veneration and pride throughout history have become a source of confusion and shame. What we once boasted about—nostalgic for that apparent “glory of the past”—has suddenly become burdensome, dense, and even devastating. It is sad to realise that that Heart of flesh was actually made of stone. That that love was not gratuitous but self-interested, that tenderness was not pure, but invasive of the other’s intimacy... The present situation is a great wake-up call for us, because in that *internal struggle* of the Heart—which no one can judge but God alone—we know that our entire spiritual life is at stake. Saint Paul tells the Romans: “*So I find this law at work in me: Although I want to do good, evil*

Fifth and sixth trips to Rome

February–March 1887 and 1889

After the journey that ended in January 1879, Fr. Etchécopar, so to speak, took a pause in his travels to Rome. Once the Congregation had been praised and approved by the Holy See, it was time to consolidate its foundations, spirit, and structure. This is what Father Etchécopar devoted himself to in the following years, in addition to promoting the cause of sanctity of the Founder.

On 5th September 1877, the Institute had received the decree of approval, which placed the Congregation under the direct authority of the Holy See, thus making it a pontifical right Congregation. The decree did not concern the Constitutions. These were subject to a trial period of about ten years. During those years, there were changes, additions,

and integrations—some decided by Rome, others approved by the General Chapters.¹

The two trips mentioned in this article concern precisely the approval of the Constitutions.

February–March 1887

Before the end of the planned ten-year period (which ultimately stretched to thirteen), Father Etchécopar decided to travel to Rome with his assistant, Father Victor Bourdenne. The purpose of the trip was to gather information and advice in view of the approval of the Constitutions², and to consult certain members of the Roman Curia on how to complete the parts that were still insufficient³.

1) For example, the Constitutions presented in Rome in 1877 lacked a chapter on the rights and duties of the Vicar or Delegate of the Superior General for America; it needed to be added.

2) Cf. Letter to a bishop, 2nd October 1887.

3) Cf. Minutes of the General Council, 5th August 1887.

The Superior General, with the consent of his Council gathered on May 27 and 28, 2025,

– decided to present **to the ministry of priesthood the Deacons:**

- **Salomon BANDAMA and**
- **Brou Aurélien Emeric KOUAMÉ;**

– admitted to final profession our Brothers:

- **Hervé Constant CHEGHE,**
- **Toussaint Tah KOUAMÉ,**
- **Charles Fabian Koui MAHAN,**
- **Eric Moustapha TOURÉ.**

The priestly ordinations will take place on Saturday, July 12 in Yopougon through the imposition of the hands of the Bishop, Mgr. Salomon Lezoutié; the following day, Sunday 13 July, the perpetual vows will be received in Adiapodoumé by the Regional Superior, Fr. Simone Panzeri scj, delegate of the Superior General. (SMG Region, Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire) ■



*is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work within me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" (Rom 7:21-25a).*

Without doubt, living with these internal and external institutional contradictions in the present time, we are invited to return to the wellspring of our charism, to allow ourselves to be clothed by the Spirit of Christ, if we truly want to "belong to Christ." It means not resigning ourselves to living half-heartedly (without radicalism or prophecy), or worse, tempted to live a double life (devoid of all truth).

We are living a key moment in our history, a time for contemplating once again the open side of Jesus pierced by a lance, from which flow the blood and water of our redemption. Manifesting His immense mercy, the spring of Grace flows from the Heart of the Beloved. *"Let him who is thirsty come to me, and let him who believes in me drink."* As Scripture says: **"From his heart will flow springs of living water"** (Jn 7:37b-38).

We Betharramites must be men and women who value and live intensely our vocation (whether religious or lay): and we do so *with and from the heart*. Although the world today is driven by other "intelligent" and very reasonable algorithms, it is not right to devalue or ignore *"the reasons of the heart that the mind ignores"* (Pascal). *Dilexit Nos* (No. 11) tells us: *"If the heart is devalued, what it means to speak from the heart, to act with the heart, to mature and care for the heart is also devalued. When we don't appreciate what is specific to the heart, we lose the answers that intelligence alone cannot provide, we lose the encounter with others, we lose poetry. And we lose history and our stories, because the true personal adventure is the one built from the heart. At the end of life, that is all that will really count."*

We Betharramites live our **mission in community** and know how important it is to overcome divisions with a united witness, in the image of the Trinity, as our Constitutions put it (cf. Rule of Life 93). *"Only from the heart, will our communities succeed in uniting their diverse minds and wills and bringing them into peace so that the Spirit may guide us as a network of brothers and sisters, as peace-making is also a task of the heart. The Heart of Christ is ecstasy, it is going out*

of oneself, it is giving, it is encounter. In it, we become capable of relating to one another in a healthy and happy way, and of building the Kingdom of love and justice in this world. Our heart, united to that of Christ, is capable of this social miracle." (DN28)

I would like to conclude this reflection by evoking the powerful intercession of Mary. "...Thanks to the immense spring that flows from the pierced side of Christ, the Church, Mary, and all believers, in different ways, become channels of living water. Thus Christ himself displays his glory in our smallness." (DN 176). Like Saint Michael, we always find in her that good disposition and that healthy submission to all that God wants and does.

In Corde Iesu.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

QUESTIONS TO SHARE:

1. Is there a passage from the text that most caught your attention? Share freely what challenged or helped you.
2. Share in community your witness about some apostolic action you have experienced this year that is a sign of the love or compassion of the Heart of Jesus.
3. In what sense do we Betharramites reflect our identity as apostles of the Sacred Heart today, and in what sense do we fail to do so?
4. What can we do to overcome the counter-witnesses of the heart of stone and be more faithful to Christ with a heart of flesh?

Final profession and jubilee

(Vicariate of India,
S M J C Region)

On May 18th, in Mangalore, **Br. Stevan Wilfred Rodrigues** pronounced his perpetual vows in the hands of the Regional Superior, Fr. Wilfred Perepadan scj, delegate of the Superior General.



The day was also chosen to celebrate the jubilee of the Mangalore community. Honoring the community with his presence, Bishop Aloysius Paul D'Souza, Bishop Emeritus of Mangalore, presided over the Eucharistic celebration and joined in the joy of this jubilee: 25 years serving the formation of young candidates for religious life.

The solemn Mass brought together a host of guests, including benefactors, teachers, well-wishers, members of neighboring religious communities, and clergy. The ceremony stood as a testament to the enduring mission and commitment of the Betharramite community in Mangalore.

Following the Eucharistic celebra-

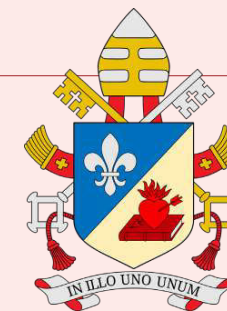
tion, a felicitation program was held, during which heartfelt tributes were offered to the newly professed brother. A special highlight of the evening was the release of two significant publications: a commemorative souvenir capturing the spirit and journey of the Jubilee, and a new book authored by Fr. Arul, the superior of the community—both adding depth and richness to the celebration.

The evening concluded with a fellowship dinner, fostering joyful interaction among the guests and community members. The entire celebration was marked by reverence, simplicity, and joy, leaving all present with cherished memories of a truly meaningful occasion. ■

and no one is left out. Therefore, all this leads me to go out and seek what the world considers lost: in the words of Francis, to go to the existential peripheries—not just the geographical ones. What, in the eyes of the world, we might think is spoiled, lost, meaningless, irretrievable, worthless, (or not worth the effort, for nothing good can come of it) is precisely the reason for the opposite. We can find ourselves and find a reason to love, and can dedicate ourselves to the work proper to the priests of Betharram: i.e. consecrating ourselves through vows to the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ, Humbled and Obedient. Through this we obtain a similar happiness for others. From this Betharramite spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, I am invited to consider the poor as subjects of love, dignity, and rights; not from the perspective of giving, charity, philanthropy, or mere helping, but rather the ability to share the same destiny with them.

I remember my first experience of sitting down with them to eat on the street in Barracas, which I had to do outside the church. Sharing a ham and cheese sandwich was a very beautiful experience. We sat

on the sidewalk to eat together, to share together, and there came out very beautiful things to share, to say to each other, and hug. That is the place of the Heart of Jesus: the most peripheral, most difficult, most distant periphery. For me, devotion to the Sacred Heart is an eyes-wide-open mysticism that leads us to see reality as it is and not as we want it to be, and that leads us not to overlook or make invisible our poorest brothers and sisters. In the Heart of Jesus, they come first, they are central for us: the marginalized, the homeless and those with addictions, broken families, the sick, the elderly, those who are alone, those who have no one to cry with, no one to share with, those children who suffer violence, who suffer abuse at home, outside of it, and also within the Catholic Church. Therefore, it seems to me that there is no other option than to follow this path, in the Heart of Jesus, the heart of the world, and in the deepest, even darkest, part of the heart of the world, the Heart of Jesus. ■



Take courage! Without fear! Many times in the Gospel Jesus says: “Do not be afraid”. We need to be courageous in the witness we give, with the world and above all with life: giving life, serving, sometimes with great sacrifices in order to live out this very mission.

I saw a little reflection that made me think a lot, because it also comes out in the Gospel. In this sense, someone asked: “When you think about your life, how do you explain where you have arrived?”. The answer they gave in this reflection is in a certain sense mine too, with the verb “to listen”. How important it is to listen! Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice”. And I think it is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the Word of God. Then also listen to others, to know how to build bridges, to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors thinking that we have all the truth and no-one else can tell us anything. It is very important to listen to the voice of the Lord, to listen to it, in this dialogue, and to see where the Lord is calling us towards.

Walking together in the Church, let us ask the Lord to give us this grace of being able to listen to His Word, to serve all His people.

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER LEO XIV
IN THE CRYPT OF SAINT PETER'S BASILICA

Vatican Grottoes
Sunday, 11 May 2025

Creation of an independent commission of inquiry

• Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj

Listening to, acknowledging, and supporting the victims of sexual and physical violence committed within the Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram school over several decades is a commitment and a priority for the Congregation of Bétharram.

To express its deep compassion for all those who were victims and to address the questions it is asking itself, the Congregation is undertaking a truth-seeking initiative to understand what failed so gravely and for so long within its organization, and to consider measures of reparation and prevention.

To this end, it has sought the expertise of an NGO, the IFJD (French-speaking Institute for Justice and Democracy), to create an independent commission of inquiry, entrusting it with the following missions:

- To carry out the most comprehensive possible assessment of the physical and sexual violence committed at the Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram institution, particularly through the collection of testimonies;

- To identify the causes of the systemic nature of the violence within the Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram institution, as well as the causes of the denial and impunity that surrounded this violence for several decades;
- To propose measures of recognition for the victims and a process of memorial reparation (apologies, a monument and/or plaque, a day of meetings...);
- To propose a system of reparation for victims of sexual and/or physical violence;
- To propose administrative and educational reorganization measures and to assess those already in place in order to prevent any recurrence of physical and sexual violence in the future;
- To make recommendations on the creation and/or functioning of listening and support units in France and abroad.

This commission of inquiry, whose independence is central to the process

“We all enter the Heart of Jesus”

• Fr. Sebastian García scj

As a very young child, I was always struck by the experience the priests of Betharram had of the spirituality of the Sacred Heart. It somehow encompassed all devotions but gave them a new meaning: that of Jesus Christ, abandoned and obedient, who says Ecce Venio, and out of love for the Father, gave himself to all his Father's desires for the salvation of all people.

This “*Here I am!*” surpassing all obstacles so that others could experience the same happiness, captivated my heart. I believe this is one of the reasons ...one of the beautiful reasons why I wanted and still want to be a priest. This is the Sacred Heart: the one who offers himself to the Father and lives for others.

We all enter the Heart of Jesus,



how little the priests obey their bishop and the desire to fight so great an evil." (Spiritual Doctrine § 221)

One might think that, in founding the Congregation, Saint Michael Garicoïts wanted to help heal the world of these two evils that plagued it: *"Do we want to cure the world and cure ourselves? Seek God in all things, offer everything to God that He might reign in us and over His enemies."* (Spiritual Doctrine § 60)

We also know his great desire when founding the Congregation: *"Oh! If only we could gather together a society of priests having for their programme the very programme of the Heart of Jesus, eternal Priest, Servant of the heavenly Father: absolute dedication and obedience, perfect simplicity, unfailing gentleness! These priests would be a real mobile camp of elite soldiers, ready to hasten at the first signal of their leaders, to go wherever they were called, even and above all to the most difficult ministries, unwanted by others!"* (Spiritual Doctrine § 6)

Father Etchecopar said about Saint Michael Garicoïts: *"I remember the impulses which came from the soul of the venerated founder when he reminded us of our special consecration to the adorable Heart and of our solemn profession to love him, to imitate him, to spread his cult and the reign of his vertus."* (Father

Etchecopar to the Brothers of America, Betharram (18 June 1886).

All these feelings of our founder express that, thanks to our vocation and Betharramite mission, we are at the service of the greatest love for its healing and saving efficiency reach people who, may be only through us, can know, love and be forgiven by Jesus. He gave his life on the cross to forgive and provide a new life to all the men.

On the day of our profession, we said *"Ecce venio"* to Jesus who, in His loving kindness, loved us, forgave us and chose us to collaborate in his mission of love: to make everything new in the hearts of all men.

'This is "the true reparation asked by the heart of the Saviour". In union with Christ, amid the ruins we have left in this world by our sins, we are called to build a new civilization of love. That is what it means to make reparation as the heart of Christ would have us do. Amid the devastation wrought by evil, the heart of Christ desires that we cooperate with him in restoring goodness and beauty to our world' (DN 182) ■

undertaken, was launched on 21st April. Its work began at the beginning of May 2025, and it will submit its report in May 2026.

To analyse, explain, understand and make plans, so that the unspeakable, the unthinkable, the unacceptable never happens again: this is a necessary, imperative, and intentional endeavour, designed to make a path of reparation and prevention both possible and credible.

In addition, the Congregation is continuing to implement measures internally for the protection of minors and vulnerable people. A virtual meeting held in March with the General Council, Regional Superiors, and Regional Vicars provided an update on the prevention efforts being carried out in each Vicariate. The Congregation's Guidelines offer clear direction and propose means to combat all forms of abuse. It was emphasized that, in several contexts, local episcopal conferences also have strict protocols for combating all forms of violence. Each Vicariate is establishing a listening and support unit in coordination with national authorities, along with two to three training sessions per year for religious personnel, involving qualified professionals.

Today, every religious member must

be fully committed to supporting and rebuilding the lives of victims, and to preventing all forms of violence against minors and vulnerable people. This is a priority for each individual, for everyone, and for the entire Congregation—an ongoing, daily commitment to care and vigilance! ■

Communiqué of the IFJD on the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the sexual and physical violence committed at the Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram College



In a communiqué dated February 28, 2025, the Congregation of Bétharram announced that it has decided to create an Independent Commission of Inquiry into the sexual and physical violence committed at the Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram College. It has entrusted the chairmanship to Professor Jean-Pierre Massias, President of the IFJD, in a mission letter dated March 14.

After careful consideration, the latter has decided to accept this request, on the condition that the independence and autonomy of this commission, would be fully respected by the Congregation of Bétharram.

Mission of the Independent Commission of Inquiry

The object of the Commission is to measure and analyse the gravity of the violence committed, to propose reparation measures in addition to those already in place, and to plan the implementation of guarantees of non-repetition in the future. Organised along the lines of Truth Commissions and based on the principles established by Louis Joinet, it is expected to submit its report by December 2025¹. It will conduct a multidisciplinary study based on interviews with the various stakeholders involved and through the analysis of the Congregation's archives and all relevant literature,

1) The deadline has been postponed afterwards to end may 2026. (Nef Editor's note)

to the sacred Heart has found a special diffusion. Our Father Saint Michael felt its importance when, as an assistant-priest in Cambo, he promoted the first confraternities of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Then Charles de Foucauld (I do like to remark that the inspiration of our logo, now, has borrowed much to the image of "Jesus Caritas" so dear to Fr. Jean Mateo scj, our master in St. Michael), and Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, all have continued

to let themselves inhabited by the love of the Heart of Christ.

It is good for us, in this moment of passion and grief which pains us, to be able to turn ourselves towards the heart pierced by the centurion's spear, and to draw from this river of water and blood the mercy which will help us to have the feelings of the Heart of Christ saying to his Father: "here I am, in love". ■

How great it would be...!

• Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Saint Michael Garicoïts calls his experience of God's love a marvelous spectacle. This spectacle is a meditation about the mystery of the Incarnate Word saying to his Father: "Here I am, out of love rather than any other motive". But this marvelous spectacle includes as well as the signs of his time which are illuminated by love, humility, gentleness and obedience of Jesus' Heart: "This is how God loves us: this is how Jesus Christ our Lord and creator became an indescribable attraction for our hearts, a perfect model and

an all-powerful help. But we human beings are cold before God! Even among the priests there are very few who say as their divine Master did: "Here I am, Ita, Pater!" (Founding text)

After French Revolution saint Michael Garicoïts had to undergo difficult times. He suffered from dechristianization of France and disobedience of the juring clergy¹ to the bishops and he felt a great call from God to collaborate with others to fight these evils: "What has led me to live withdrawn at Betharram is seeing

1) During French Revolution, the clergy split into juring priests (those who took the oath of loyalty to the State before all foreign influences such as the Pope) and non-juring or refractory priests (those who refused).

It has pleased God to make himself loved...

• Fr. Jacky Moura scj

This could be the title of the encyclical letter *Dilexit nos* by Pope Francis. The accents are the same. The son of Saint Ignatius links up with saint Michael Garicoïts' founding intuition, in the will to underline the revelation of the love of God's heart in the heart beating in the chest of the man Jesus of Nazareth. And it is good to feel proud to have been called to belong to this family of the Sacred Heart, in the time when contemplating this dimension of « height, width, depth » of our God's Love is proposed to the universal Church.

Pope Francis tells again how much the heart is truly the center of the human person. In this world which is at risk of losing heart, it is essential that, in each person, all the actions be placed under the "political control" of the heart. A reality chosen with the heart is apprehended better and leads to appeased relational choices. Its invitation is to go towards the heart of Christ, the center of his being which is "a furnace of divine and human love, the greatest plenitude man may reach. It is in this

heart that we recognize ourselves and learn how to love".

"The heart of Christ is ecstasy, coming out, gift, meeting. In him we become capable of health, happy relations with one another, and of building the kingdom of love and justice in this world. Our heart united to the heart of Christ is capable of this social miracle".

For us, the question is an invitation to get united with him, to admire the splendour of his infinite love. The Gospel has to be read and meditated to discover all the gestures of love which reveal it.

We have received this invitation from all the messengers which, in the history of the church, have underlined, so to speak, the declarations of love of the heart of Christ.

It is enough to quote a few names of those who have been touched : Augustin, Bernard, François de Sales, whose disciple, Marie-Marguerite received in Paray-Le-Monial the mission of making it known and loved. Listened to by Claude de la Colombière and after him the Ignatian Family, the devotion

in order to document the complexity of this violence and its consequences for the victims.

The commission's terms of reference are threefold:

- To measure and analyse the intensity of the violence committed,
- To propose reparation measures in addition to those already in place,
- To consider the implementation of guarantees of non-repetition for the future.

It will be organized around three axes: Understanding, Reparation, and Prevention.

Understanding

– To establish a diagnosis concerning the volume, frequency, and sexual and/or physical nature of the violence committed within Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram by religious or lay personnel;

– To analyse the roots of the violence committed, both in its implementation and in its tacit or express "acceptance" (leading to the neutralisation of control processes). This involves understanding not only the mechanisms of control and abuse, but also the community dysfunctions that have encouraged these actions and led to a system that has allowed the committal of acts of violence for half a century.

Reparation

– To propose a system of individual reparation for victims of sexual violence committed by lay people, a principle the Congregation has already accepted. As a complementary measure, propose a system of individual reparation for victims of purely physical violence. These proposals could take the form of specific mechanisms or referrals to exist-

ing institutions, including the CRR. These proposals will aim to ensure that no victim is excluded from the scope of material reparations and to ensure maximum equity between reparation processes.

– Develop a memorial policy based on the recognition of the Congregation's responsibilities and collective reparation measures to contribute to the victims' recovery. With this in mind, the report prepared following this mission will be published in full.

Prevention

– Based on the evidence-gathering work carried out, propose reforms aimed at preventing further violence, including responding to the demands of victims who legitimately request that the abuses be prevented from recurring. The study will therefore focus on the past, but also on the present and future of Notre-Dame-de-Bétharram College, in order to contribute to the healing of the community. The proposed measures may also be useful to other educational institutions wishing to implement a prevention policy.

– Based on a partial investigation conducted abroad, propose the creation or reform of listening cells for the Bétharram communities abroad, in order to prevent the risks of physical and/or sexual violence against particularly vulnerable populations. With this in mind, two exploratory missions will be conducted in Central African Republic and Thailand.

Composition of the Independent Commission of Inquiry

The commission is placed under the authority of the President and is composed of three categories of members: commissioners, lead commissioners, and the ethics committee.



All the members, all the organs of holy Humanity certainly contributed, each according to its functions, to the Redemption of men. But none like his Heart. His Heart played the most important part, having never ceased to beat or to love.

This is why, in Christian language as in the wider world, the Sacred Heart has become synonymous with the God-Man.

So is it not more accurate to say that He himself became Sacred Heart? ¹ ■

1) From a page from his Gospel Lectures.

Heart of Jesus

The Word became the Sacred Heart (John 1:14)

• Fr. Denis Buzy scj (1883 - 1965)

By becoming flesh and “becoming like (other) men” (Phil. 2:7), the Word was especially eager to take on a heart like ours.

If the Father, since creation, had not yet been worshipped as he deserved to be, humanly speaking, it was not worship that he needed first, but love. Love is the first requirement of every being, God or creature. Until then, the Father had received from men only a love that was shared, adulterated, or disputed. Falsehoods or defilements, good at most for idols! God from eternity remained hungry for love.

How could this eternal and infinite hunger be satisfied?

Ecce ego, Mitte me (Here I am, send me....Isaiah 6:8).

“Father,” the Word eternally said to him, *“if you will it, I am ready, send me.”*

The Incarnation took place.

As soon as the first heartbeat had marked the beginning of his life in the womb of his divine Mother, the first act or cry of love burst forth towards the Father: *“Abba, Pater, Father, beloved Father!...”*

Suddenly, the millennia-long delay was made good. Even if they had tried faithfully, men could not have offered the Lord even so much as an incense grain of pure love, whereas this first act of the Heart of the God-Man, because it was infinite, suffices to love the Father as much as he was capable of being loved. And because the Son of Mary took, from that first moment, the place of all men, his brothers, his first cry of love transformed all their stammering, even all their blasphemies, into an infinite homage, infinitely pleasing to the Father.

If the first beat of the Heart of Jesus was sufficient reparation, what a ransom, what a treasure, what a marvel was a whole life of love until his last breath!

The Commissioners

The ten commissioners are professionals with diverse skills (law, history, psychology, sociology) and diverse experiences (past collaboration or former members or chairpersons of similar commissions).

The Lead Commissioners

In an inclusive approach, three representatives of the Betharram Victims' Collective and one member of the Congregation are included as lead commissioners. These members will be fully involved in the entire process, both regarding the nature and direction of the investigations conducted, and in the development and formulation of the analyses and recommendations included in the final report. Their personal involvement and knowledge of this case make them essential and indispensable players.

The members of the Betharram Victims' Collective have agreed to participate in the work of the Commission of Inquiry, alongside the IFJD, due to the guarantees of independence and autonomy, which notably imply that the Commission has free access to the premises and archives of the Betharram congregation.

The Ethics Committee

Composed of eminent figures, the Ethics Committee will participate in the commission's plenary sessions, assess the work accomplished, and provide an advisory opinion on its progress, if necessary.

Although the commission retains control over its final conclusions, the interaction with the lead commissioners and members of the Ethics Committee aims to support its reflection and ground it in reality, while making this process the beginning of exchanges and dialogue between those affected by this violence.

Working method of the Independent Commission of Inquiry

To carry out its tasks, the Commission will rely on the work of two investigators.

The Commission's operations will be managed by IFJD staff, who will be responsible for coordinating and organising the work, monitoring the schedule and budget, and organising all working meetings and sessions.

The Independent Inquiry Commission will hold its first working session, intended to launch its work, in May. Its final report will be published in December 2025¹.

Commission Members:

- Jean-Pierre Massias, Professor of Law at the University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour and President of the IFJD;
- Dominique Attias, Lawyer, Vice-President of the Paris Bar (2016-2017), an iconic figure in children's rights in France and internationally;
- Véronique Blanchard, Historian, Lecturer-Researcher at the University of Angers, Member of the TEMOS Laboratory;
- Xavier Philippe, Professor of Public Law at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Director of the IFJD;
- Kelly Picard, Lecturer in Public Law at the University of Saint-Etienne, Director of the IFJD;
- Pascal Plas, Professor of History at the University of Limoges and Director of the IIRCO (International Institute for Research on conflict);
- Muriel Salmona, psychiatrist and president of the Traumatic Memory and Victimology Association, former member of CIIVISE;
- Jean-Pierre Rosenczveig, magistrate, former president of the Bobigny juvenile court (1992-2014), former member of CIASE;
- Jocelyne Valentino, clinical psychologist;
- Philippe Vitale, professor of sociology at Aix-Marseille University, president of the

¹) In May 2026. (See previous note, NEF's editor)

information and historical research commission on displaced Reunion Island children in mainland France.

Lead Commissioners:

- Olivier Bunel, member of the Bétharram Victims Collective
- Alain Esquerre, founder of the Bétharram Victims Collective
- Alexandre Perez, member of the Bétharram Victims Collective
- Laurent Bacho, representative of the Bétharram Congregation

Members of the Ethics Committee:

- Jean-Arnold de Clermont, former president of the Council of the French Protestant Federation (1999 to 2007), former President of the Conference of European Churches (2003-2009), former President of the Pharos Observatory, Administrator of the IFJD
- Geneviève Garrigos, former President and Spokesperson of Amnesty International
- Véronique Margron, President of the Conference of Religious Men and Women of France (CORREF)
- Jean-Marc Sauvé, Honorary Vice-President of the Council of State and President of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE)

Investigators

- Timothée Brunet-Lefevre, Doctor of Political Science from the EHESS (School of Advanced Health Studies)
- Claire Parjouet, Doctor of Law from the University of Pau & Pays de l'Adour

■ <https://institut.ifjd.org/commission-denquete-independante-notre-dame-de-betharram/>