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Nouvelles En Famille



A Pilgrimage through
Southeast Asia,
in the missionary spirit of
Saint Michael



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A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH SOUTHEAST ASIA,

in the missionary spirit of Saint Michael

“Before you can be a missionary,
you must be a man of prayer.”

(Saint Michael Garicoïts)



Dear Betharramites,

The joy over the recent election of Pope Leo XIV still resounds in the Church. The entire Catholic flock, attentive to the new Successor of Peter, prepares to walk with him, guided by his Magisterium of *Peace, fraternal acceptance, and love for all, especially those who suffer most. With the Lord walking among us, “evil will never prevail,”* the Holy Father told us before blessing the People of God.

Therefore, this month of May, dedicated to Saint Michael Garicoits (May 14) and to the Most Holy Father Auguste Etchecopar (May 30), two pilgrims of Hope, we address the theme: the *Mission in Southeast Asia*. After so many years of missionary dedication by the religious who after being expelled from Yunnan, worked for evangelisation in those lands (Thailand), today the harvest is abundant. *“They go out they go out full of tears, carrying the seed for the sowing; they come back, they come back full of song, carrying their sheaves”* (Ps. 126:5-6).

The emigrés from China and those who followed them were barefoot

interpreters of the missionary character of our charism, present from the very beginning of our Congregation. Indeed, Saint Michael Garicoits desired for his religious, that pilgrim and obedient spirit, ready to *“set out at the first signal from their superiors and bishops, to take on all the tasks entrusted to them, even and especially those that others reject. Men stripped of everything, dedicated to God and to souls, who serve without attracting attention and do so forever and out of love.”*

The first Betharramites had tasted this *“manna hidden from the eyes of others”* (SMG) and set out on a mission to America in 1856 to serve the Basque emigrants in Argentina and Uruguay, following an agreement between the Bishop of Buenos Aires and the Bishop of Bayonne. Later, they expanded to Paraguay and Brazil. Saint Michael wanted to join the initial group, but Bishop Lacroix prevented him from doing so—he wanted him in Betharram, and the Saint of the Heart obeyed, as always.

While this may have been the most important missionary mission experienced by the *Society of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, it was not the only one. Years later, in 1920, Pope Benedict XV called on the Fathers of Betharram to go on a mission to China. The proposal was received with great enthusiasm among Betharramites (there were numerous novices and scholastics who dreamed of offering themselves for such service). The grace of the Lord continued to work in their hearts, prompting them to accept great sacrifices to establish a mission in such remote lands. Challenged by the teaching that Saint Michael had proclaimed to them:

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you, sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos (Jn 20:21). So we, like our Lord, are entrusted with the execution of the Divine Will.

*But to what are we sent? To the cross, like our Lord; **to the cross of our position, to profit from it.** This is how each one must approach his tasks and ministries: teaching, missions, etc., and, within this perspective, embrace the crosses of one’s position.”* (DE 345)

I was very pleased, during my visits, to see that this missionary spirit, this desire to **“go out”** to evangelise, still exists in many of us today. Some tell me: “We must return to China, I am willing.” Others tell me: “I am willing to go to another

vicariate or another region, if you ask me.” This willingness expresses the “secret spring” that is activated in generous souls and leads them to say, “Here I am, Lord, send me,” taking on all challenges—even the “crosses of position” that may arise—without losing their enthusiasm.

This spirit is felt in Thailand and Vietnam today. Here are some points from my report after the Visit:

They have a clear mission among Christians (who are a small minority in the country) of different ethnic groups, primarily the Karians, but also the Aka, Lahu, etc.

They preserve the missionary spirit, inherited from their elders. They thus manifest their love for the congregation through their willingness to go wherever they are sent.

The relationship with the local Church is very good. The bishops express a sense of gratitude toward the Betharramites of today and those of previous generations.

There is a careful care of minors and people in vulnerable situations in the mission, according to the guidelines of the Congregation and the orientations of the local Church.

The Betharramites of Thailand and Vietnam have achieved a very clear unity and brotherhood. They share the goods and gifts they receive (rice, fruits, vegetables, etc.). They share with simplicity their personal gifts, qualities, abilities, etc. They have respect for one another, especially between juniors and seniors. They respect authorities and superiors.

They also have an interesting synodal style for addressing issues of interest to everyone. They hold regular meetings every two months. Everyone participates, and no one is isolated from the common work.

The benefactors of the congregation fulfill a key role in the life of the Vicariate. They have a place in the family of lay people and religious. They are well received in the communities and highly respected.

There is a good relationship with the former students (the alumni), which fosters the creation of links with other lay people of the Betharramite family.

Much progress has been made in the material state of the parishes, works, and the Foundation. The projects were adequately funded with various contributions from the congregation and benefactors. Material resources are sufficient for all projects. Contributions from the dioceses are paid into the Vicariate’s account and are subsequently redistributed. In Thailand, there are no personal accounts. Accounts are rendered

periodically, as required by the Rule of Life. The congregation's format is being finalised. Collaboration is underway with the General Council.

The union between Thailand and Vietnam has been very positive. It has allowed for greater interaction between two closely related communities. Regular exchanges between the two countries have served to cultivate a family spirit and join forces in the mission.

There are one (or two) Thai religious collaborating in mission in another part of the region.

The Indian religious (in Thailand and Vietnam) and the Vietnamese students in Sampran and in the missionary communities are warmly welcomed.

The formators are committed to the Initial Formation Project.

There are good, active, and trustworthy vocations in Vietnam and Thailand. They are working well for vocations. For example, next year, 16 children will enter Payao, and eight from Mateum III (third cycle - secondary school) will go from Payao to Ban Betharram (Sampran). Some candidates are also waiting for their place in Vietnam (but the house has limited space to accommodate them all).

Thus, the Betharramite pilgrimage to Southeast Asia is a reason for renewed hope for the entire Congregation. The charism of Saint Michael lives on among us, and this is a reason for joy—amid the many sorrows we experience—to offer as a tribute in this month dedicated to our founder.

May God bless you.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

Superior General

TO SHARE IN COMMUNITY:

1. What aspect highlighted in the Thailand-Vietnam report caught your attention the most?
2. How do you embody in your vicariate the missionary spirit that Saint Michael intended for us?
3. Share your testimony of an edifying missionary experience you have had.



Miserando atque Eligendo

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

As I sense that the twilight of my earthly life is approaching, and with firm hope in Eternal Life, I wish to express my final wishes regarding my burial place.

I have always entrusted my life and priestly and episcopal ministry to the Mother of Our Lord, Mary Most Holy. Therefore, I ask that my mortal remains rest, awaiting the day of resurrection, in the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

I wish that my final earthly journey conclude precisely in this ancient Marian shrine, where I go to pray at the beginning and end of every Apostolic Journey to faithfully entrust my intentions to the Immaculate Mother and to give thanks for her gentle and maternal care.

I ask that my tomb be prepared in the burial niche in the side nave between the Pauline Chapel (Chapel of the Salus Populi Romani) and the Sforza Chapel of the aforementioned Papal Basilica, as indicated in the enclosed plan.

The tomb should be in the ground; simple, without particular ornamentation, and bearing only the inscription: Franciscus.

The expenses for the preparation of my burial will be covered by a benefactor and the sum will be transferred to the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major. I have given the appropriate instructions to Monsignor Rolandas Makrickas, Extraordinary Commissioner of the Liberian Chapter.

May the Lord grant the deserved reward to those who have wished me well and will continue to pray for me. The suffering that marked the final part of my life, I offer to the Lord, for peace in the world and brotherhood among peoples.

Domus Sanctae Marthae, 29 June 2022.

FRANCESCO

Francis, a Father who introduced us to the joy of the Gospel

The message from the USG President, Fr. Arturo Sosa, in memory of Pope Francis and his relationship with consecrated life

21 April 2025

[...] Perhaps one of the most illuminating concepts about Pope Francis' pastoral method is what he wrote in *Evangelii gaudium*: that it is more important to initiate life processes than to conquer spaces of power (cf. EG 223). This conviction can illuminate our memory now, sad and grateful at the same time, in these days of farewell from him. It is important to do so in order to understand on what path Pope Francis leaves us, on what process of life he helped us enter, in what direction he helped us take our first steps. It is a bit like when the disciples of Emmaus saw Jesus disappear, after He had accompanied them for a long stretch of the road, conversing with them and loving them until their hearts burned with the desire to be with Him always. The two disciples understood that Jesus had accompanied them to show them a way, a road to travel, on which to run, a road that from his word and the broken bread of his life given would give their whole existence a joyful direction of witness

and communion. The disciples of Emmaus set out again because from that companion they received a direction to follow with their whole life and also a new energy to travel it.

That is why it is important now to meditate on the life processes that Pope Francis has initiated with us in the Church. It is not important that these processes have reached their completion. After all, a life process never ends, but it has the positivity of giving our journey a meaning, a direction, the energy to follow it.

Pope Francis has initiated conversion processes with us, especially in consecrated life. He has offered us clear lines on where we are called to convert again and again to the Gospel. He has thus introduced us to processes of humble recognition of our shortcomings and frailties, of what in our progress, in our history, in the behaviour of the members of our communities, especially those in positions of responsibility, is still not faithful to Christ, † Francis thus began

with us a process of new awareness of our mission. A mission made of welcoming, of encountering, of putting our person, our communities, at stake with the man, with the poor whom we often do not see, because he is on the edge of the road or behind our closed doors, and who silently asks to enter the path of our life and vocation.

Pope Francis was not concerned that we have so many vocations, but that we all respond to the vocation of walking together and with the poor, because our vocation is our brothers, our sisters, with whom we live a fraternity, a communion that is always greater than the enclosures of our Orders, our communities, our pre-established missions.

All of this means that Francis has also begun with us a process of renewal of mysticism, of walking with Christ present, in love with Him; a process in which consecrated life, like all Christian life, is renewed within a friendship with Jesus, ever more intimate and dilated. Certainly, his last Encyclical, *Dilexit nos*, on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus, turns out to be for us like the last testament of a father who wishes his children to live to the full by letting himself be loved and loving without limits. A testament that is a testimony,

that is transmission from the heart of the father to the heart of the children, of an inheritance that is not material: it is a love to live, a love to love.

If we welcome and live the inheritance of these processes of life that began with him, which we have the responsibility to carry forward, that is, to transmit in our turn, certainly the fruit of the journey with Pope Francis will be a new vitality of our vocation, which does not depend on strength, numbers, or abilities, but is a gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The legacy of the Holy Father Francis will not make us protagonists of power games, which today increasingly dominate the world and are insensitive to the true needs of humanity and peoples; it will make us protagonists of the ever new Kingdom of Christ whose law is the Gospel of love.

We can bid farewell then to Pope Francis with a renewed joy of living the Gospel - *Evangelii gaudium* -, certain that in these processes of new life our father and brother will continue to accompany us with his great heart and ardent prayer. ■

A Pilgrimage through Southeast Asia, in the missionary spirit of Saint Michael

25 years of ordination

• Fr. Tidkham Michael Jailertrit scj (Maepon)

As a Betharramite priest. I am proud, and give thanks to God that He called me and chose me to be His servant. Moreover being in the family of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, I am grateful to the Missionaries who came to Thailand and shared the love of God to my family and Karen people.

In the year 1998, I made my perpetual vows with confidence that now I was fully a member of the family of Betharram. Each day I discerned my faith journey in following the footsteps of our founder St. Michael Garicoits, saying 'here I am' ready to deny my own will and ready to do the will of God. In the year 1999, I was ordained a priest. The Congregation supported me in taking up the ministry as formator, to accompany the young and guide them in following



the spirituality of St. Michael Garicoits. As the times goes on, I realize the love of God is great and wonderful.

I appreciate that the grace of God always accompanies me. After many years in the field of formation, I was commissioned to do parish ministry. I am happy to serve the people of God as a parish priest. It is a great



joy to be among the sheep as a good shepherd. I am helped to go out of my comfort zone and devote time to the poor and marginalised. I thank God

for the good opportunity to be at Mae Pon Parish, where there are 87 boarding students, and also a High School run by the Government.

On the Jubilee year 2025, I would like discern my spiritual journey progressively with a pilgrimage to Betharram, France, as I have never been there before. My purpose is to follow the footsteps of St. Michael Garicoits our founder at his birthplace of Ibarre. In order to renew, uplift and deepen my religious life. ■

The direction of the Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam

• Fr. Kriangsak Luke Kitsakunwong scj (Regional Vicar)

How blessed to live as witnesses of Jesus Christ, source of our joy, in giving ourselves “totally to bring to others that same joy.” (DS § 1)

As we journey through this pilgrim year of hope, the Church invites us, Betharramites, to come together in a synodal joy called by the

Lord Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. We, Betharramites in the Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam, are also called to move forward with new mission frontiers, following the call of our founder, St. Michael Garicoits, who said, “*Always forward.*”

When we reflect on the past 70 years of our presence in Thailand, we remain grateful to God for His providence through the missionaries and priests who sacrificed their lives for the mission of Betharram in Thailand. They left everything behind and followed the footsteps of Jesus while embracing the charism of St. Michael Garicoits. These dedicated Betharramites came to Thailand to sow the seeds of faith among the people in the villages of northern Thailand and proclaim the Good News to the people of God. Now, we can see the fruits of that faith growing and spreading in that region of Thailand.

Although we may be small in number and lack material resources, we

firmly believe that, through God's providence, Betharram will continue to thrive in Thailand and in the hearts of the faithful. Furthermore, the Congregation has been expanding into Vietnam, focusing on formation for mission for over the last 10 years. This growth is a testament to God's guidance and the action of the Holy Spirit as we move toward the future.

I hold to the image of "sowing seeds" of love and righteousness, which will eventually blossom in beautiful outcomes later in life. The image prompts us to look beyond the present and consider how our actions and choices will affect the future. Scripture warns us to be mindful of our decisions, as we will ultimate-



ly reap what we sow, as stated in Galatians 6:7, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”*

This signals the direction in which our Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam is heading. The seeds of faith that the missionaries have sown are now growing and bearing fruit through the members, who are actively growing and serving the people of God in the villages. In the future, we hope that our Vicariate will establish new missions in other dioceses and support other vicariates.

Our Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam is gradually growing, step by step, particularly in the area of formation. The number of our candidates and seminarians is increasing in both Thailand and Vietnam. While we may not know what the future holds, we continue to trust in God’s providence. Although we are a small group, we hope to send our members to assist with ministries in other Vicariates. We also welcome members from other Vicariates to join us in our mission. They have effectively enhanced our formation and mission.

The Thai Betharramite communities’ “Here I Am,” has the potential for future growth. We are hopeful

for what lies ahead, as we are a young Vicariate with many young religious members. We are continuously growing day by day. So far, we have already sent some of our members to England and Vietnam, and we plan to send more members for missions in other vicariates and to other dioceses. In the dioceses of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai in the north of Thailand, we are doing well, but we understand that in the future, we must open our hearts and minds to new missions where the local church needs us.

As young religious members, we must step out of our comfort zones and work on improving ourselves in areas where both the Congregation and the Church need us. We surrender ourselves to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us to the fulfilment of the mission entrusted to us through the family of Betharram. May we never lose sight of the commitment we made to the Lord. ■

Collaboration between SCJ Fathers, Brothers, benefactors and ex-students

• Fr. Mongkhon Camillo Charoentham scj (Chomthong)

Our first formation house was at Mae Sariang in Mae Hongson province begun by Father Mirco Trugnach scj. But then we moved to Sampran at Nakornpathom. After some years we separated the formation houses, (the new) Ban Garicoits house for the Scholastics and (the old) Ban Betharram house remained as our minor seminary.

Fr. Mirco and Fr Terry O'Malley were our first formators. Both of them developed connections with Christians around our formation house in St. Peter's parish. Our community at Sampran began a mission of visiting Christians, house by house ... visiting the elderly... holding communion services.... funeral Masses... Christmas prayers ... and other sacramental services. The people came to know us more and more because we lived a simple lifestyle after the example of St. Michael Garicoits. We went to houses where nobody had visited before, and some of them became our benefactors. We still continue to try to live simply now.

Since 2012 I began to gather to-

gether some of our Betharram alumni. I began when I was at Garicoits house, and others continue this work till the present day, with junior priests taking up the project.

Our present brothers [scholastics] at the formation house, work with the fathers to welcome benefactors and Betharram Alumni to the formation house for special occasions such as Christmas time, Our Lady of Betharram feast day, Birthday celebrations, memorial Masses and other functions.

So we review this collaboration at our vicariate meetings, and work out how to organise and work as a team. Our Fathers give spiritual guidance, and explore with our Betharram alumni how they can help our vicariate and how the vicariate can help them. Each father keeps in touch with his benefactors and welcomes them to our vicariate celebrations to make all of us a unity and help us all to feel at home with a deep sense of belonging to Betharram.

This collaboration begins with fa-



Presence and help of our alumni and benefactors during the 2023 General Chapter in Chiang Mai



thers in the formation house and in the parish. The formators and senior and junior seminarians live a simple life. Thus we began to show people our Charism, our motto and our lifestyle and welcome them to our community. Whenever we have any big celebration we invite our benefactors and ex-seminarians, and all of them are ready to help us. We serve them through attending to their spiritual needs and by sacramental service. They attend to our physical needs by gifts of food or accommodation. They feel them-

selves to be part of our Betharram family.

So I can say that we have a mutual support ...mutual friendship with one another. When we gather nobody puts on airs and graces. As priests and ex-seminarians there is no 'them' and 'us'. We are simply friends in the family of Betharram to which they feel they belong. Whenever we need help they are ready to come and help, by their service or by their financial offering, so we enjoy a good mutual support and fraternity. ■

Recognition for service in mountain villages

• Fr. Chan John Kunu scj (Chomthong)

Once in 2008, Bishop Joseph Phiboon Visitnonthachai (now Bishop Emeritus of Nakornsawan Diocese) asked Fr. Michael Tidkham Jailertrit (then Regional Vicar of Thailand) where Betharram found financial support for the education of the seminarians of the Congregation in Thailand.

In reality we did not have any sources of funding since we only served and collaborated with the local di-

oceses in different parish mission areas. It is only by the Providence of God and the cooperation of members in the vicariate (towards a self-sufficiency encouraged by our Generalate) and through some donors, that we found funds.

And so Fr. Michael Tidkham wrote a letter to request the secretary of the Thai Bishop Conference to look sympathetically on our struggle to pay the tuition fees of Lux Mundi

College which were then increasing. By God's grace we still have vocations in the vicariate.

The Bishop's Conference understood our situation and since 2008 granted our request to pay just half of the college fees of Lux Mundi, a concession that continued in the time of Fr. John Chan as Regional Vicar and continues now in the time of Fr. Luke Kriangsak, present Re-

gional Vicar of Thailand and Vietnam.

We remain grateful to the Bishop's Conference of Thailand for the generosity towards the vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam till today.

We implore Almighty God to bless and shower his abundant graces upon each member of the Bishop's Conference to continue to serve God whole heartedly. ■

Accompanying the Young in Formation in the Land of Smiles

• Fr. Michael Bistis Fernando scj (Sampran/Ban Garicoits)

“Wherever there is joy, enthusiasm and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations arise” (Pope Francis, World Mission Day, 2014).

I am deeply delighted to share my mission experience from Ban Garicoits formation house, Thailand, the land of smiles. Our major seminary is located in Sampran, which is fondly referred to as the 'Vatican of Thailand' due to its large Catholic population and numerous religious congregations.

I am truly honoured to be part of

this formation house, which is increasingly international and intercultural, welcoming formators and seminarians from Thailand, India, and Vietnam.

I am grateful to the Vicariate of Thailand, of which I am now a member, especially to Fr. John Chan Kunu, the scholastic master of the house. Together, we work to instil in these young men the values of Betharramite formation, education, and practical opportunities to engage with the community, helping them prepare for their future as

Betharramite priests in the footsteps of St. Michael, our father.

Guided by faith and strengthened by a rich Betharramite history, Ban Garicoits—where I proudly belong—continues its sacred mission of preparing Betharramites to serve with humility and zeal. We are confident in the enduring light of our Betharramite charism and the providential hand of God.

My primary responsibility is to guide the pre-postulants (grade 12 graduate seminarians), postulants, and scholastics who are pursuing their philosophical and theological studies at Saengtham College (Lux Mundi national seminary). I am glad to help them develop academic discipline and achieve both human maturity and spiritual growth rooted in the rich Betharramite traditions so they can effectively witness Christ.

My missionary work also involves collaborating with the seminarians from the dioceses of Thailand at Saengtham National Seminary. Currently, there are about 410,000 Catholics in Thailand, which accounts for 0.58% of the country's



population of 69 million, the majority of whom (over 90%) are Buddhists. The Thai Catholic Church has approximately 570 diocesan priests and 300 religious priests. According to the Church Statistical Yearbook 2024, there are also 314 major seminarians at Saengtham. What a joy to instill the Betharramite approach to academic formation here at Saengtham bringing the same joy of Christ (DS 41) to these future missionaries in the spirit of solidarity and compassion.

I am proud to represent Betharram at Saengtham, working alongside the diocesan formators to create an environment where students can excel academically while also de-

veloping a deep sense of compassion, empathy, and service to others. Our goal is to form mature and well-educated men for the priesthood—men of deep faith, rooted in charity, humility, gentleness, obedience, devotedness contained in that first act of the Sacred Heart: *Ecce venio!*” (DS 44). Over the past two years, I have seen our efforts yield results, transforming individ-

uals into not only scholars but also compassionate leaders dedicated to serving their communities and the Church in Thailand.

I earnestly request your sincere prayers for an increase in Betharramite vocations in Thailand. This will enable us to continue serving the Church in Thailand and the universal Church in the future. ■

Missionary of the Here I am among the Karen

• Fr. Pierre Caset scj interviewed by Fr. Reegan Nagamani scj
(Betharram)

A few words, Father Caset, about your missionary journey in Thailand?

In 1966, I departed for Thailand. I was accompanied by Father Mirco, who had already spent ten years on a mission in Thailand, particularly in Chiang Mai. My first three years were devoted to learning the Thai language with Father Luzzi in Chiang Mai. At the end of the third year, I went to do an assignment in Ayutthaya, Bangkok. I spent a year in the local church among Thai priests. There, we spoke real Thai—the everyday language!

After three years, Bishop Lacoste

told me to return to Chiang Mai to work with the Karens alongside Father Rodriguez. So, we studied the Karen language by living among the villagers because they only spoke that language. We were together for three years. Then, I was asked to replace Father Mirco in Maisarigue. I founded a new missionary post in Millanoye, which was an old village. As I was starting to grow older, the bishop appointed me to establish a new district for the mission. That was my final post, from 2000 to 2009.

We also worked with the Jesuits, the



priests of the Paris Foreign Missions, and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, founded in San Sebastian. I left the mission in Thailand due to illness—kidney failure. I spent my entire missionary life among the Karens.

You must certainly have some enriching and positive memories?

We did remarkable work among the Karens. They were animists and did not speak Thai. There were few conversions to Christianity among the Buddhists, but some Protestant Christians became Catholic. I will never forget the warm welcome and the friendliness of these people.

What I also cannot forget is the work of romanizing the Karen lan-

guage to make translation and writing possible. We translated the New Testament into the Karen language. There were only seven or eight Betharramite fathers at the mission among the Karens.

We also wanted the Karens to progress socially. So, we created a boys' boarding house in Maepong so they could learn to read and write the national official language; Thai.

I remember that at the beginning, there were 700 catechumens preparing for baptism. I thank God for having seen, after 40 years, that there were 80,000 Christians among the Karens.

How did you receive the call to become a missionary?

My first inspiration came from my cousin, a priest who was a missionary with the Paris Foreign Missions; he was in China and finished his mission in Malaysia. Like him, I wanted to become a missionary. In 1958, if I remember correctly, our Chapter had asked to send more missionaries to Thailand after Bishop Lacoste's call. I responded to that invitation.

What was your relationship like with the villagers in building Christian communities?

The Church is not a personal affair. I couldn't form a community on my own. We therefore walked a lot, going from village to village to evangelize. At first, we started forming communities by bringing together groups of five villages in small chapels. Oh, they were very simple chapels, built of wood by the villagers themselves. Of course, it was frowned upon when people converted to Christianity. I remember the fervour of the first converts. One village mayor was looked down upon after his conversion. He then decided to build a separate village for all those who had become Christians. Some of the faithful still call

me on the phone, and I even had a visit from a family last summer, here in France.

What were the difficulties you faced during your time with the Karens?

The Karens are kind, but it was very difficult and tiring to walk from village to village in the mountains. We often used to catch illnesses. I did not want to return to France however, but my health condition forced me to do so. I returned in 2009.

What are your wishes and words of encouragement for the young Thai Betharramite brothers who follow in your missionary footsteps?

I remember they didn't want me to leave their country. I love them all. I'm happy to see the Bétharram family growing where we planted the seeds. I'm proud of our mission among the Karens, where we welcomed brothers into our Bétharram family—some of whom received baptism from our own hands. I'm proud of our Thai brothers. They come to visit me here in France when they can. I still have fond memories of Thailand. I don't want to disturb our young brothers too much because I trust them to grow on their own. ■

“Here I am” in South-East Asia; Thailand and Vietnam

• Fr. Albert Sa-at Prathansantiphong scj (Ho Chi Minh City)

“Go from your country, your people and your father’s house to the land I will show you.” (Gen. 12;1)

I was thinking about how to write a reflection on “Here I am”, and remembered the time when I was reflecting and writing this once before (in April). I remembered that experience of ten years ago. It was on April 22nd 2015 that I received a letter from the Superior General to start the mission in Vietnam. Personally, this appointment did not surprise me because I had been asked once after my diaconate ordination.

I replied to the Superior General with the same answer “Here I am” on April 24th, 2015. Of course, the ‘Here I am’ I gave to Superior General was also a question filled with worries to me. ‘What shall I do? What do I need to do for the mission? How do I apply for the visa? and how do I learn the language? These things came to my mind. Then, I just sat down alone in my room and I suddenly remembered the prayer, “Dear Lord, if it is your will, may you lead me and guide me and let everything be done

by your will. But if it not your will, please show me the way.” Through this prayer, the call of Abraham emerged in my reflection and made me feel relaxed, calm and peaceful to carry out this mission. God said to Abraham, “*Go from your country, your people and your father’s house to the land I will show you.*” (Gen12;1), without any question or doubt, Abraham went as the Lord directed him... (Gen12;4). Then, I said to myself gently, ‘Go Sa-at, God will direct you as He directed Abraham’.

At that time, when the mission in Vietnam officially started, I paid a visit to Italy. According to the appointment letter, the mission would start on July 1st, 2015. And on the same day, the first Betharramite arrived in HCM City (Fr. Yesudas). I travelled from Sampran to HCM City on August 18th, 2015.

We all know that to start the first mission in a new place is not so easy. From my viewpoint my initial ‘Here I am’ was not sufficient. I needed to put ‘Here I am’ wholeheartedly to the task that I was asked to do.

Looking back, saying 'Here I am' helps me discover its power. When I was young, I used to say 'Here I am' without knowing its meaning. In my training in the seminary, I said to my superior or even my friend when I was asked to do something, 'Here I am'. Later on, I reflected that it was like Samuel relying to God on Eli's advice, *'then the Lord called Samuel and he said, "Here I am"'* (1 Samuel 3:4). At that moment he did not understand anything, he just thought that it was Eli who called him.'

We have another beautiful example from St. Michael Garicoits' childhood. When his grandmother Catherine asked him about his study, "Tell me, Michael, if they allow you to go away and study, what would you do?", he replied boldly, "I'd be off like a shot tomorrow morning." Both Samuel and Michael did not understand the will of God at that time, but their responses led them to fulfill the will of God immensely. It is true that we start a task from a tiny thing and learn from nature around us. A big tree begins from a small seed to grow, becoming a shelter and bearing fruit. From a grain of rice becomes rice grains.

My memory keeps going back to the history of our congregation in

Thailand. The seed of "Here I am" from Dali, Yunna, China brought flourishing to Thailand. On November 23rd, 1951 the first Betharramite arrived in Thailand (Fr. Jean Saint Guily). Who would know that this was the first seed of 'Here I am' planted in Thailand in 1951? It was a similar event that the first seed of 'Here I am' was planted in Vietnam in 2015. And now both seeds have been growing up, 74 years in Thailand and 10 years in Vietnam. This is the power of 'Here I am' that our mission has grown to the present day.

We could say that 74 years is not a short period of time. If we compare it with the age of a human being, it is the time of retirement. One day, when I was looking at the big tree (Rain tree) in our courtyard in Chiang Mai, I said to myself that this tree must be over 60 years old. I wondered how it could live that long and how many years it is going to survive. The first appreciation came to my mind that the roots of this tree should be strong and deep down in the ground. It may be able to live a long time if we are taking care of it and trimming the branches. Then I turned around, looking at our chapel and the three buildings, then with a smiling face I said that

it was a matter of 'Here I am'. The 'Here I am' brought our presence in Chiang Mai, in different places in Thailand and in Vietnam. A 10-year presence in Vietnam is a journey of trust and hope in the Lord. As God proved to Abraham, so God took initiative and directed him. And God assured Prophet Isaiah, *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* (Isaiah 41:10)

A big challenge to Betharramites is, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then, I said, *"Here I am! Send me."* (Is 6:8). I am sure that we all say, 'Here I am' to our superior. Yet, "Here I am! Send.....or.....?". The "Here I am" of the first two Betharramites in 1951 and 2015 challenges us all in the Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam. Am I ready to listen to the voice of the Lord through our superior to continue the same 'here I am'? It still echoes within. The seed of 'Here I am' thriving in our Vicariate must be rooted deeply rather than the external appearance of fruit, flower or branch.

As I mentioned in the first part about the power of "Here I am". It is common to say 'Here I am' and everyone can say it. For Betharramites,



this should be in action rather than just a word, we are the people of 'Here I am'. Betharramite received the charism of saying 'here I am' in fraternal life as in the mission. And we all take seriously what we have freely committed ourselves to by profession, without devolving responsibility to others (formators, superiors, the community, etc.) (Acts of the General Chapter P.69 no.6-7).



Our 'Here I am' always comes along with a responsibility just as when God called Moses in Exodus, *'When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*' (Exo 3:4) After saying yes to God, God gave him a mission to do. Therefore, the power of 'Here I am' is to fulfill the will of God. And through our commitment, God's work will be done.

Our master Jesus, in his whole life, said 'Yes' to the Father (*Ita Pater*), *"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine,"* (Luke 22.42). Jesus made it very clear that his focus was obedience to His Father only. He said, *"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him,"* (John 8.29).

Mary is the model of faith and obedience, always fulfilling the will of God. At the Annunciation, Mary's fiat, *"let it be done to me according to your word..."* (Luke 1:38) demonstrates her complete obedience to God and His plan for her. The Father of the Church, St. Irenaeus, says, Mary *"being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."*

Obviously, St. Michael Garicoits, a man of 'Here I am', practised this virtue in his entire life. He wanted others to practice this same virtue as mentioned in one of his letters to a nun of the Daughters of Cross on 13th November, 1852. He quoted, *"Here I am!... without delay, without reserve, no looking back, as far as I am concerned. Amen. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word'..."*

As Betharramites, we need to remind ourselves that the 'Here I am' of Jesus, Mary, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Samuel, Michael Garicoits, all prophets and saints were not only for themselves but also for others. The only way that the 'Here I am' continues growing up in the South-East Asia, in the vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam is '*a Betharramite is a man who always says "yes" (=Ecce Venio), a man without ambitions and above all, a happy man.*' (Acts of the General Chapter P.30). This is the best way to help this virtue rooted in a firm and deep ground so that people can appreciate what appears outwardly like fruits, flowers and branches. So,

everything in our conscious conduct must respond to the Holy Spirit and to our superiors; '*Here I am, without hesitation, without reservation, without looking back, out of love for the will of God!*' (DS. 45-46)

And '*Let us be, by our actions, the living expression of his doctrine and his teaching. To this effect, let us stamp each of our thoughts and actions with the Ecce venio of his humility and generosity (devouement).*' (Circular 1st Nov. 1891). Our "*Here I am*" IS "*let it be done to me according to God's will... not mine.*"



THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, FR. GUSTAVO AGÍN SCJ, WITH THE CONSENT OF HIS COUNCIL GATHERED ON 23 & 24 APRIL, 2025,

- ADMITTED TO FINAL PROFESSION, **BR. STEVAN WILFRED RODRIGUES** (SMJC Region, Vicariate of India). The ceremony will take place on 18 May in Mangalore.

- IS PRESENTING THE DEACONS **JOHN WEERAPONG YOUHAE AND NICOLAS SURASAK DOOHAE** (SMJC Region, Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam) TO THE PRIESTLY ORDINATION, scheduled for 28 June in Chiang Mai.

On 10 May **Br. Artid Jamo** of the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam (SMJC Region) made his first profession in Chomthong.



14 may 2025
Happy Saint
Michael's day
to all!

† Fr. Dominic INNAMORATI scj

Birmingham, 28 November 1931 • Olton, 1st March 2025 (England)

Excerpts from the funeral homily of Fr. Austin Hughes scj

Nobody in church today can remember 1931, the year father Dominic was born. But there are a few who can remember the year he was ordained 1955! That year we had just got a new Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden. Beer was only a shilling a pint. The Pope (Pius XII) only spoke to visitors in Latin, and he never left the Vatican. So what a changed world we live in now!

Back then the supposition was that though the world might change, the church never did. And priests were ordained with that view in mind. They would never need to change. But the Holy Spirit plus the changing world of the 50's and 60's, plus Pope John XX-III, blew all that complacency apart, and it is to Fr.Dominic's credit that his whole life became one of learning, growing and changing.

I first met Fr Dominic at Easter 1963 when as young boy I came on a vocations discernment week to Sambourne. And I can still remember Fr Dominic and Fr Boyle singing Easter services at Coughton.

I didn't realise then, that 6 months



later he would become my English teacher, my history teacher, and my games master. For Fr Dominic, after a week of teaching and a weekend in a Birmingham parish, would referee the football matches on a Sunday afternoon, and in summer would be the cricket umpire. People told me later that in his youth he was rather good at both games.

By nature Fr Dominic was quite a studious person, and could give the impression of a closed manner, but this was misleading, as behind the spectacles there was a very open mind, and great intellectual curiosity.

Soon after ordination he was put into teaching, firstly at our prep school

at Sambourne, then the apostolic school, then the secondary school at Droitwich.

Many people here today have reason to be grateful for his spirit of willing service, whether in various parishes he served... Droitwich... Great Barr... Leigh... Balsall Heath, or in his other ministries: Hospital radio, inter-church ministry, and pilgrimage to Holy Places.

At St Joseph's Leigh, his talents as historian and English teacher were used well as he turned his hand to writing a life of St. Michael and a life of Fr. Etchecopar, along with editing volumes of their letters.

His thirst for knowledge did not abate in recent years whether in projects for our Congregation like international training session in the Holy land, or home grown projects like study sessions St. Anselm's in Margate or the many Diocesan in-service training schemes in Birmingham.

In 1997 Fr. Dominic turned 66, the age at which most people look forward to a gentle retirement, and he embraced a new post at Balsall heath: parish priest at Saint John and Saint Martin. These were among the most fulfilling 22 yrs of his life, and he became fiercely proud of 'My parish' sometimes to the amusement of his fellow

religious. He surprised everybody with his energy and forward-looking initiatives. His Spiritan predecessors in the parish had wanted to make the parish a centre for interfaith dialogue and never quite succeeded, but Fr. Dominic did!

Behind all his intellectual achievement there was a great simplicity of heart. St. Michael liked to quote these words of Jesus '*you have hidden these things from the learned and the wise and revealed to mere children*' (Matt 11.25). For despite his learning Fr. Dominic has always had a simple commitment to the values of the gospel, and a willing obedience. A powerful witness.

In the last few years he found declining health and physical powers hard to cope with, especially when failing health and lack of mobility forced him to leave the parish in 2019. There was an inner journey to be made. He found that hard, but he was always spiritually alert to end.

For ourselves now at his funeral we have permission to let all our feelings be unbound... the mixture of grief and relief... the regrets... the sadness... the nostalgia. But above all, a great thanksgiving to God for a life well lived. And hope in the risen Jesus. ■

150 years ago: The Decree of Praise • 30 July 1875

Roberto Cornara

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the approval of the Congregation by the Holy See. Indeed, on 30th July 1875, the Congregation of Bishops and Regular Priests issued the *Decretum Laudis*,¹ that is, the decree by which the Institute founded by Father Michael Garicoïts was recognised by Vatican institutions as a Congregation of Pontifical Right, no longer subject to episcopal authority.

We already know the long and obstacle-filled story that led to this final act, the difficulties faced by Bétharram in being recognised as a fully-fledged religious congregation, the not always smooth relationship with the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr Lacroix, and the intervention of Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified.²

We also know that in the end, the bishop gave in to the Fathers' requests and, impressed by the visions and words of the holy Carmelite, it was decided to write to Rome to obtain the decree of praise from the competent authorities.

«Most Holy Father, I have the happiness

of having in my diocese a congregation of regular priests, established under the name of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, following a common rule under the direction of a Superior General. Founded in 1832 by a priest animated by the Spirit of God, in the shadow of the ancient and venerated sanctuary of Our Lady of Bétharram, it has grown and prospered with marvelous rapidity... I believe this pious association to be worthy of encouragement, and I join my supplications with those of the devout priests who compose it, that Your Holiness may deign to grant apostolic approval to their constitutions.»³

The *decretum laudis* of 1875 was the first step toward official and definitive recognition, which took place by another similar decree two years later, on 5th September 1877. To obtain this latter recognition, the Congregation had to revise its Constitutions to adapt them to the expectations and style of the Roman Curia.

1) See *Decretum Laudis* in wikipedia.

2) See *The History of Constitutions published in the NEF of 2014 as well as chapters VI and VII of The man with a radiant face by P Duvignau.*

3) *The man with a radiant face*, p. 68-69.

This was the work on which Father Etchécopar and the Congregation focused in the years between the two decrees, and which required the

Superior General to travel to Rome no less than three times in that short period.⁴ ■

4) See The History of the First Three Journeys to Rome, published this year in the NEF, in January, February and March.

DECREE OF PRAISE, 30TH JULY 1875 ¹

In the Diocese of Bayonne, near a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and known as Bétharram, there was founded in 1832 a pious congregation of priests, under the invocation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose members have, as their principal aim, besides their own sanctification, to teach to the youth humanities, good morals, and the Catholic religion, to bring back or preserve populations from the errors of our time through the preaching of the divine word and the dispensation of the manifold grace of God, and to maintain them in sound doctrine. In addition, they make the three simple vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity, and are subject to the authority of a Superior General.

Recently, their Superior General earnestly requested our Most Holy Father Pope Pius IX to grant apostolic approval to his pious congregation and its constitutions, of which he submitted a copy. And His Holiness, in an audience granted on 23rd July 1875, to the undersigned Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars Priests, taking into account the letters of recommendation from the bishops of the places where this pious congregation is established, praised and recommended, in the most favourable terms, without infringing upon the rights of the Ordinaries established by the holy canons and apostolic constitutions, this society with simple vows governed by a Superior General, as he praises and recommends it by the tenor of this present decree, postponing to a more opportune time the approval of the pious congregation and its constitutions, regarding which some observations have been transmitted.

Given in Rome, at the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on July 30, 1875.

A. Card. Bizzarri, Praefectus

L. † S.

S. Archiepiscopus Seleuciensis, Secretarius

1) From Basilide Bourdenne, The Life and Work of the Venerable Michel Garicoïts, 3rd revised edition, Beauchesne, Paris, 1918, pp. 561–563

“ Together, we must look for ways to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a Church ever open to welcoming, like this Square with its open arms, all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue and our love. ”

Pope Leo XIV



Societas Sacratissimi
Cordis Jesu

Betharran