



Nef

2025

Nouvelles En Famille



**A Good Time to Draw
from the Wells of Our
Charism**

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A Good Time to Draw from the Wells of Our Charism

“A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’.” (Jn 4:7)



Dear Betharramites,

Last July I had the opportunity to participate in the Latin American Meeting of Betharramites (ELAB), which takes place every six years in Etchecopar Region. I met once more with the brothers, religious and laypeople at San Bernardino, Paraguay. We made a pilgrimage to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Caacupé, where we celebrated the Jubilee Mass. We shared the dreams and challenges of those who today journey together in the “*continent of hope*.” Their warm welcome, their fraternal communion in mission, and their witness of service to the poor are an encouragement for the life of our Congregation today. As it happens in other regions, I discovered with them the life that still lies within our communities, beyond their visible fragility. In a synodal Church, by renewing our fidelity to our vocation, we becomes more *prophetic* before the momentous challenges the Church faces. The important thing is that Christ is proclaimed, “*in season and out of season*” (2 Tim 4:2). And that we do so being *humble, submissive, persevering, and always joyful* (SMG).

I confess that, along with signs of hope, I found a certain human and pastoral weariness among several of our brethren. A sign that we must heed so as not to fall into (i) possible fragmentation of energies or (ii) become woefully trapped in an individualism that leads to questioning and greater frustration. We need each other!

I also participated in the gathering for young religious in Latin America, led by Br. Fernando Kuhn, a Claretian. Many of the concepts I share in this NEF are inspired by his reflections on ongoing formation, which were like an “oasis,” reminding us of some key treasures to draw from the sources of our charism:

The first stage: Five years and ten years after final vows or ordination. These are times of youthful enthusiasm and love for Christ and mission, during which we must help young religious discover a new way to remain faithful to God, so that they can respond to the challenges of their new situation. I also think about how much a religious needs to prepare to become comfortably integrated into a new culture, whether a new vicariate or region (something we don’t always pay sufficient attention to when we send young Betharramites on mission): changes of country or continent, language, culture, food, lifestyle, priorities, economic resources, ecclesial practices, etc. Therefore, it is important to help them balance their spiritual life with pastoral ministry. We shouldn’t overload them with overwhelming activity. We should expect them to be present in the community, to share life, to be accountable, etc. All of this seems natural to us, yet sometimes it doesn’t happen... We expect to integrate them somewhat “by magic” and don’t ask ourselves why there is resistance... Could it be that those of us with more experience aren’t setting a clear example of what we expect?... Ongoing formation helps us realize that the place for growth is the community, and that we live just and harmonious relationships to the extent that we all commit to being faithful and creative in our way of life. Today we must include an intercultural and inter-generational perspective. But we won’t achieve this if we leave young people alone, or if they don’t allow themselves to be accompanied by those who have this mission.

The second stage (mid-life) is another important time to draw from the sources of charism. It encompasses the period from approximately forty to sixty years of age. The maturity acquired during this stage is the best help in recovering “the fervour of our first love.” It is usually reached after several years of active ministry, marked by both successes and failures. The ripe fruits of mid-life are not harvested without cost. During mid-life, one begins to experience a gradual decline in physical abilities, and some health issues may arise. Many existential questions emerge. The emotional life begins to feel the pull towards a solitude that is not always “filled” or “nourished by the Spirit.” This can be a time for discovering the true inner treasure, since the external sources that gave us a

seeming identity no longer provide the same meaning in our life. We begin to realize our limitations, and that we are journeying towards the end of life, which is now closer. This is not a time for resigned disillusionment, but rather a time to respond by returning to the sources that can refresh an existence that may be attracted by activism and individualism.

Some of our newly ordained Betharramite priests are already experiencing this stage (today, some are ordained at forty years old), and at the same time, they are at the beginning of their journey as religious or priests. We must be attentive to supporting them, and they must maintain the necessary humility. A document on religious life states: *"We must help our brothers at this stage, in the light of the Gospel and the charism of the Congregation, to renew their original decision and not to confuse the integrity of their commitment with the level of good results"* (VC 70). This is where there's no excuse for not pausing the routine of life and for not attending an appropriate renewal programme: e.g. Ignatian Exercises, a personal retreat, a renewal programme for our particular stage of life, etc. The best would be a sabbatical period, which would involve not only taking a Study Course and changing communities for a time, but also a true *kairos*, for our vocation.

The third stage covers retirement age to living in community in later life. This stage can vary depending on one's activities, on age, on decline in physical or mental abilities. While the members of the Congregation of Betharram are missionaries for life, it is important to realistically assess one's capabilities and allow oneself to be supported during this period. Sometimes this will mean realistically assessing the kind of mission a religious can still carry out. Between the ages of 65 and 85, many things can still be done for the community in service of the mission. Elders are entrusted with transmitting the memory and wisdom of our history. They must do so with gratitude, not with bitterness or pessimism, and certainly not with disdain for past failures. It is like living the twilight of their lives, setting an example for others. If I may say so, I owe much of my own vocation to the good example of the Betharramite missionaries I knew in the place where I grew up. This new stage is often marked by a time of detachment from the activities that have been carried out for many years. This can be painful, but it is also wise and fruitful to know when we should relinquish the roles we have held, and to do so with a serene and yet expectant attitude. We must learn to accept and integrate the reality of the end of our earthly life

with Christian joy and hope.

The fourth stage of life is also a time of ongoing formation. These are the years of biological and cognitive decline, which, within the community, reflect the decline of the life of a man of God. It is the final “Fiat” of the life of a mortal being. Signs of weakness, vulnerability, and the need for assistance become essential. It is an opportunity that Providence gives the community to live out concrete charity toward those who depend entirely on others. *It is the time to imitate Jesus, who knew that the time had come to leave this world and return to the Father, and having loved his own, he loved them to the end.* I take this opportunity to thank the laypeople and religious who provide personal care to our brothers and sisters in this “final stage,” in which each day is like a hymn to life, even while carrying the cross, as the man from Cyrene did.

I send you a fraternal embrace in the Heart of Jesus and wish those who are starting anew a good year, and to those who are continuing... “good progress” (as the Italians say).

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

Superior General

FOR REFLECTION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY:

1. What was your last experience of ongoing formation: retreat, course, sabbatical, further studies, etc.? What positive aspects did you gain from it?
2. How do you feel about the stage of life you are currently in: from a human perspective, or from a religious-ministerial point of view?
3. Drawing from the healing sources of our charism: What new spiritual nourishment do you need at this stage of your life as a Betharramite religious or priest?

NOTE: In September, activities resume in Europe, Africa, and the Holy Land. In Rome, we begin with the publication of the NEF for all of you.

Other Betharramite communities are already fully engaged in their activities, as is the case in Asia and South America. The service of the General House requires great adaptability to the various times, languages, cultural customs, traditions, time zones, etc. I thank all those who support this service each year, especially the lay and religious collaborators in the different regions where the Betharramites are present.



Dear brothers and sisters,

At the heart of the account of the Passion, in the most luminous and at the same time darkest moment of Jesus' life, the Gospel of John gives us two words that contain an immense mystery: "I thirst" (19:28), and immediately afterwards: "It is finished" (19:30). [...]

I thirst, says Jesus, and in this way he manifests his humanity and also ours.

None of us can be self-sufficient. No-one can save themselves. Life is "fulfilled" not when we are strong, but when we learn how to receive. It is precisely at that moment, after receiving from unknown hands a sponge soaked in vinegar, that Jesus proclaims: It is finished. Love has made itself needy, and precisely for this reason it has accomplished its work.

This is the Christian paradox: God saves not by doing, but by letting himself do. Not by defeating evil with force, but by accepting the weakness of love to the very end. [...]

The fulfilment of our humanity in God's plan is not an act of strength, but a gesture of trust. Jesus does not save with a dramatic twist, but by asking for something that he cannot give himself. And it is here that the door to true hope opens: if even the Son of God chose not to be self-sufficient, then our thirst too – for love, for meaning, for justice – is a sign not of failure, but of truth. [...]

Jesus saves us by showing us that asking is not unworthy, but liberating. It is the way out of the hiddenness of sin, so as to re-enter the space of communion. Ever since the beginning, sin has begotten shame. But forgiveness – real forgiveness – is born when we can face up to our need and no longer fear rejection. [...]

In fraternity, in the simple life, in the art of asking without shame and offering without ulterior motives, a joy is born that the world does not know. A joy that restores us to the original truth of our being: we are creatures made to give and receive love. [...]

To read the full text: [***General Audience, St Peter's square, Wednesday 3 September 2025***](#)

Two Moments to Draw from the Wells of the Charism

Kairós: a Propitious Time

During the winter holidays, we Betharramites of the Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region set out as pilgrims of hope, heading together to San Bernardino, Paraguay, to live an authentic kairós.

From July 15 to 17, the ELAB (Latin American Meeting of Betharramites), was held, bringing together religious and lay people from the three Vicariates. We opened the meeting with an invitation to “enter into deep contact with our humanity,” to learn to recognize with greater sensitivity the life flowing through our communities and the works entrusted to us.

We had the joy of welcoming Sr. Nancy Fretes, a religious of the Company of the Order of Mary Our Lady, who encouraged us to continue building synodality, walking together – religious and lay – in the experience of the charism and shared mission. She invited us to live discernment as a way of life, rooted in listening to the Spirit, and to practice ever more concrete co-responsibility within the ecclesial community. This

calls for ongoing conversion, enabling the participation of the entire Region in shared decision-making processes. In this way, the Betharram mission takes shape as a communal and deeply experiential journey.

On the occasion of the Jubilee Year, we went on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Caacupé together with lay people from the Paraguay Vicariate. We set out with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our hope, who urges us to move forward driven by love more than any other reason. Mary, our Mother, accompanied us on this journey, teaching us to take steady steps, rooted in our reality, and to wear the sandals of the pilgrim.

From July 18 to 20, the Meeting of Young Religious took place, led by Br. Fernando Khun, a Claretian missionary. The meeting unfolded in a spirit of fraternity, allowing us to dream of a Betharram that is always young, able to renew itself by returning to its charismatic sources, like a tree planted

Fr. Davi Lara scj
Regional Superior



“along the river.”

In this journey of pilgrimage and sharing, the young people of the Region expressed the desire to take the lead in a new stage, looking to the future with active and creative hope. The synodal experience strengthened the conviction that it is necessary to listen attentively to the voices of the new generations. Also, it confirmed that the vitality of the charism springs from fruitful dialogue between the more experienced Betharramites and the younger ones: a mutual exchange that generates life and hope.

We thus experienced a true renewal of our being Betharramites, rediscovering the ability to dream, plan, and hope, with our gaze fixed on the horizon and our feet firmly rooted in reality. This

helps us not to lose sensitivity toward the lives of those around us and invites us to go beyond ourselves, crossing the borders of our own security. Our family, present in fourteen communities and engaged in various ministries, requires dedication and availability from each of us. For this reason, we intend to continue promoting ongoing formation in the Region on a regular basis. During the Young Religious Meeting, a proposal emerged to begin, together with Br. Fernando Khun, a formation pathway open to all the Region’s religious.

In the shared work between religious and lay people, which takes place in our schools, parishes, and communities, we are having a concrete experience of synodality. We walk together, sharing the charism of Betharram, and



thus carry our mission forward.

Every Betharramite is called to ask: How can I build synodality in my Vicariate, in my community, in my mission? This question should open us to the new, to unexplored possibilities, letting ourselves be surprised by God, by our brothers and sisters, and by the poor.

Humanly speaking, we experience limits and fragility: the aging of our religious, the fatigue of some young people who feel overwhelmed, the personal crises of others. This is our reality, and it is precisely here that the Lord invites us not to be paralyzed by fear but to renew hope and continue walking together, welcoming our weaknesses as the place where He works.

The experience of the meeting challenges us to keep alive the flame of hope and to remain open to the newness of the Spirit. It reminds us that true

transformation does not come from extraordinary events but from faithfulness in the everyday: attentive listening, fraternal life, and the willingness to be formed by the community.

We return to our reality carrying in our hearts the echo of the reflections and testimonies shared, along with a renewed commitment to be builders of bridges and sowers of hope. The journey of synodality continues and calls us to accept with courage the challenge of moving forward together, convinced that the richness of the Betharramite vocation is found in unity lived within diversity. Each day, inspired by Mary's example and with our eyes fixed on Jesus, we want to respond with generosity and joy to the call of God and to the needs of the brothers and sisters entrusted to us. ■

A Young Religious at ELAB 2025

Fr. Antonio Thiago Gordiano Sampaio scj

This is the second time I have had the opportunity to participate at such a gathering; the first was in 2019, after my first vows. I am returning now as a professed religious and about to complete my first year of priestly ministry.

First of all, I highlight the very nature of this gathering: how wonderful it is to reconnect with familiar faces, to hear voices that were part of our formation process and are part of our religious life! There is a feeling of being at home, of truly being family, of being in touch with the different shapes the Betharramite charism takes in each place where it is present. There is too the sense of perceiving how we embody today the “Here I am” of the Heart of Jesus that so captivated and strengthened St. Michael. This gathering, in itself, becomes a moment of inner renewal of our call to religious life.

It is worth valuing the initiative (taken some time ago by our Region) to share these

moments with laypeople who are directly involved in our pastoral or missionary work. It is an exercise in listening to other voices, voices that emerge from a different way of being in the world than consecrated life ... voices that challenge us from their perspective. Hearing them speak with so much love about the charism of Betharram, about St. Michael, and about the value of our works, strengthens our sense of belonging, strengthens us, and becomes an opportunity for renewal of our consecration.

This sharing with the laity leads us directly to the theme of synodality that



guided our meeting. How can we continue to grow in a synodal way in our Region and in each vicariate? We had the guidance of Sister Nancy Fretes, ODN. According to the Sister, we must continue to commit to encounter (among ourselves and with the laity); we must continue to commit to community life – which is at the heart of the Gospel and is a priority choice for religious; we must value moments like these to share with our brothers and sisters the concerns of our hearts, to be transparent with them; Let us dare to question some structures that, however useful they may have been in their time, may now be outdated; in short, let us remain open to listening to and following the inspirations

of the Holy Spirit, who transforms us into Christ and leads us to unity and communion in the Church of Christ, so that in our ministries we may express the unique charism of Betharram that this same Spirit has given to the Church. These have been days of renewal, of strengthening, of admiration for all that is accomplished in our Region, despite (and because of?) our weaknesses; days also to nurture the dream of a Betharram that is ever more faithful to its charism: a group of well-formed, dedicated, attentive, and obedient men, who respond to the needs of the Congregation, the Church, and the call of the Kingdom in the world today. ■

Embracing transformation

ELAB 2025 was an experience I still hold dear to my heart. These days in San Bernardino, Paraguay, were a time of encounter, prayer, and community that deeply moved me. From the moment we arrived, there was a very special atmosphere, as if everything was ready to open us to something greater. There were many of us—laity,

religious, and priests from the Father Augusto Etchecopar Region—Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina—gathered with a common desire: to share life and mission.

On the first day, we were welcomed by Fr Sebastián and Sabrina, who invited us to pause and reflect together on Betharramite pastoral and social

Gabriela Vázquez
(Argentina)



action. In this participatory session, each community was able to bring its own voice. Hearing how others live their mission in such different realities challenged me. I felt that the invitation to look at the most vulnerable people in our society is not just a slogan, but a call to allow those lives to transform us. I discovered that mission is sustained through a network, through closeness, listening, and collaboration.

We worked with Sister Nancy Fretes of the Sisters of Charity, using a very intimate and participatory methodology, which led us to a true journey via enlightenment and personal review. She invited us to pause, to look within, to let our own experience of being and doing transform our actions. She accompanied us in three areas that

touched our hearts: discernment and synodality, vocation and mission in Christian life, and responsibility and transparency in the Church. Her words, along with the dynamics she proposed, helped us go deeper. We discovered that personal and communal conversion is a journey that never

ends, and that the Church is built when we all recognise our part, share the mission, and assume together the co-responsibility of walking as brothers and sisters.

The sharing was another moment that marked me. Sharing what each community is doing, its challenges, searches, and achievements, filled me with admiration and hope. Each testimony brought with it the concrete lives of the people, their stories, their dedication. I felt that there is no way to grow in mission without allowing ourselves to be affected by the journey of others.

Prayer permeated the entire meeting. Each day, a vicariate organized the liturgy with signs, gestures, and songs that deeply united us. But if I had to



choose one moment that moved me in a special way, it was the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Miracles in Caacupé. We set out from the San José Seminary: walking together amid prayer and songs, and going through the Holy Door was a powerful sign of communion and faith. The Mass concelebrated by Betharramite priests, along with Father General Gustavo Agín, was intense and deeply moving. In that moment, I felt that the Church we dream of is possible: a Church that journeys, that reaches out to encounter, that allows itself to be moved by hope.

The overall atmosphere of the meeting was marked by fraternity and joy. There were reunions, conversations, laughter, moments of silence, and shared prayer. The bonfire evening expressed this best: music, dancing, singing, jokes, stories, and hugs. It was a reminder that faith is also celebrated, that being part of a community means supporting one another and allowing oneself to be supported.

Father Gustavo Agín's presence was a gift. With simplicity and closeness, he shared these days as one of us. His final words encouraged us to continue spreading love within the limits of our position, reminding us that every gesture, no matter how small, has value when sustained by love for God and our brothers and sisters.

I returned from ELAB with a grateful heart and full of hope. They were days of grace that renewed me from within, that reminded me that mission is not something we do alone, but rather something we build together. I take with me the certainty that walking as brothers and sisters is the most authentic way to live the faith, and that everything we shared in San Bernardino doesn't end there: it begins anew every day, in every community, in every encounter, in every step. ■

My First Experience with ELAB

Aníbal Josué Romeo Alvez,
(Uruguay)

I am Aníbal Josué Romeo Alvez, 34 years old, a single layman associated with the Betharramite community of San Gregorio de Polanco, Tacuarembó, a town in central Uruguay with a population of 4,000. I personally work as an administrator at a Law Court in La Paloma, Durazno, 40 kilometers from where I live. I am also a treasurer and Eucharistic Minister at the Parish. I am a member of the MCC group (*Movimiento de Cursillos de Cristiandad*), and I am available for any needs of Father Ángel, Brother Cristian, and the community.

Brother Cristian invited me to participate in ELAB 2025. I immediately agreed, without consulting my employers first, but thank God they authorised my leave and I was able to attend.

During that experience, I felt comfortable sharing with religious and brothers from four countries. Despite not understanding much Portuguese, I managed to integrate without difficulty and even made friends. I think language takes a backseat when one is open to fraternal encounters, in this case intercultural, letting the Holy Spirit do the rest.

I felt accompanied and integrated with everyone present at all times, where I was able to share mates, conversations, anecdotes, dances, laughter, and also the difficulties we experience daily in the mission. But the training sessions at ELAB served to deepen our evangelizing journey, providing us with concrete knowledge and tools to gradually apply in our various pastoral projects.



I am very grateful to the Betharram family for this opportunity and for my human and spiritual growth.

Thank you for being attentive to every gesture and detail that allowed me to enjoy ELAB, and in my free time, experience the beauty of Paraguay and its warm people.

Thank you for making us feel at home, for your generosity, humility, simplicity, empathy, and service to each and every one of us.

Greetings, and may the good Lord and the Virgin of Betharram continue to bless you abundantly. HERE I AM!!! ■

Sowing Faith and Hope in Young People

Br. Victor Torales scj

The recent reflection meetings at ELAB (Latin American Meeting of Betharramites) have been a privileged opportunity to listen, discern, and allow ourselves to be touched by the promptings of the Spirit within the specific context of our religious family.

Updating the Betharramite charism for young people means living and transmitting the Word of God, strengthening community life, and committing to mission, always attentive to their questions, energies, and sensitivities. It is not about repeating traditional practices, but rather about offering an authentic and approachable spirituality, capable of showing that consecrated life is a path of freedom, joy, service, and social commitment, where each

person can find meaning and fulfillment.

The Synodal Process reinforces this vision by promoting shared responsibility of religious and laypeople, recalling that all members of the People of God have a voice and a vote. Transparency, accountability, and consistency between words and actions are fundamental to maintaining the credibility of consecrated life and overcoming structures of clericalism. Shared formation and a reflective reading of the Synod's final document invite us to embrace a communal and ministerial life that is ethical, participatory, and open to the challenges of contemporary reality.

Personally, each religious or young person can experience the charism in



a transformative way by:

- *Integrating prayer, reflection, and action into daily life.*
- *Showing joy and passion for following Christ, reflecting enthusiasm and commitment.*
- *Remaining available to serve and accompany others, especially those most in need.*
- *Cultivating authenticity, consistency, and a sense of mission, becoming a living example of the charism.*

The charism becomes relevant and motivating when it connects with the real life of young people by:

- *Listening to and responding to their doubts and expectations, without*

imposing rigid models.

- *Engaging them in concrete experiences of service, mission, and evangelization that generate real impact.*
- *Giving them meaningful responsibilities within the community and the mission, promoting leadership and shared responsibility.*
- *Creating spaces for gathering, friendship, and trust, where people can grow in their faith and in their personal development.*

Reflecting on these points, we can see that our charism does not belong solely to the past, nor is it reserved only to consecrated persons. On the contrary, it is profoundly relevant and necessary today. In a time when so many laypeople



ple and young people are seeking ways to express their faith, desiring to share what the Spirit stirs within their lives, and longing for spaces where they can experience God authentically and in community, the Betharramite charism reveals itself as a fruitful response.

To embody the same sentiments of Christ Jesus—the “*Here I am, send me*”—is not merely a spiritual slogan, but a way of life that resonates with the sensibilities of young people: the search for meaning, openness to mission, a commitment to solidarity, the experience of community, and the joy of service.

Therefore, manifesting the charism today means offering concrete paths so that both religious and laypeople, including young people, can live this

availability, finding in the Word, community, and mission a space where their faith comes alive, is strengthened, and is shared with others.

At the same time, ongoing formation ensures fidelity to one’s personal vocation, to the Spirit, to the charism, and to the mission. It is a continuous, personal, and communal process, organized by the Congregation, which is implemented through systematic plans, meaningful experiences, and a constant openness to the signs of the times. This formation allows the Betharramite charism not only to be preserved, but also to be renewed and projected as a prophetic and hopeful sign of the God of Life, capable of attracting new generations to a meaningful, transformative, and profoundly

human consecrated life.

In short, these meetings at ELAB have helped us rediscover that dreaming as a consecrated person today means living the Gospel with young eyes, a passionate heart, with hands ready to serve. It means allowing oneself to be challenged by young people and walk with them, demonstrating

through one's life that the Kingdom of God remains good news, both relevant and possible. Religious life has a future if it allows itself to be renewed by the Spirit, if it returns to its evangelical roots, and if it is lived with humility and hope in the midst of the sincere aspirations of today's young people. ■

ELAB : The possibility of Dreaming

Fr. Angelo Recalcati scj

The ELAB experience was born from the initiative of the late Fr. José Mirande (then coordinator of the Betharramite Provinces of Latin America). At the time, he sought the collaboration of the formation team of which I was a member. I still remember the enthusiasm stirred up by the prospect of meeting, getting to know one another, and mapping out the path ahead together.

It wasn't yet called "ELAB." The acronym appeared when the idea arose to renew the experience periodically. What had begun as a fraternal gathering became an opportunity to think about shared projects.

In 1985, the celebration of 50 years of Betharram in Brazil (a foundation provi-

dentially inspired by the desire to "celebrate meaningfully" the centenary of the Congregation's foundation) led, for example, to "considering the possibility of giving life to a new reality by creating a new Betharram community in Bolivia." The idea was to live this anniversary differently than just through events, celebrations, and speeches, after which everything would remain the same. We hoped to bring a new creation to life, the fruit of a creative (perhaps Utopian) "Here I am." The dream did not come true, but... it has stayed in my heart.

The reasons for considering the project unrealistic were as follows: the small number of religious in the Region and the need for personnel to sustain exist-



coincide with our dreams. This year, in San Bernardino (Paraguay), I believed that the dream of a regional project might come true, when certain initiatives and new perspectives were put forward. Could these be possibilities for new life and energy for Betharram in the Region of Fr. Auguste Etchécopar?

Then we received the very deep and motivating contribution of Sr. Nancy, who launched several challenges within a synodal perspective.

The encounter between lay people and religious, with different styles and sensitivities, was fruitful. In this sense, the pilgrimage to Caacupé crowned this beautiful celebratory gathering.

ing works, etc. Opening new fronts, it was said, would impoverish us. But did we actually succeed in not impoverishing ourselves?

Paul d'Ors, speaking about Charles de Foucauld, said that this saint had gone to Morocco dreaming of converting the Tuaregs, but that God gave him the grace... not to convert a single one! And yet, his life continues to inspire many, even today.

Our dreams do not always coincide with God's.

I thought back to this project when I realized that God's grace does not always

It seemed to me that what was lacking was a more participatory preparation, enriched by the input of different realities and sensitivities.

The presence of lay people was important, including those coming from places where our religious communities are no longer present.

The moments of reflection in small groups reflected lived reality—acknowledging difficulties, achievements, and failures, without extinguishing optimism, but highlighting the challenges before us, to which we are called to respond.

Regarding synodality, it was emphasized that this is not a trend but a movement of the Spirit whose breath, if we are able to accompany it, can give birth to a new Betharram. Even if the small group reflections were not fully expressed in their richness during the plenary sharing, one could nonetheless sense the renewing spirit they awakened and the conviction that the fruits will come with time.

May we always remain faithful to the founding inspiration of our Congrega-

tion, staying open in sincere communication and the search for communion—sharing not only ideas, but above all, personal projects—in order to build together a reality in which the “Here I am” is the true expression of Betharramite hearts, “ready to run [...] wherever they might be called, even and above all to the most difficult ministries, those that others would not want.” (DS § 6) ■



Pilgrimage of ELAB participants and lay members of the Vicariate of Paraguay to the Shrine of the Virgin of Caacupé.

Gathering of Young religious: A Synthesis

Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez scj,

In his message to the 28th General Chapter (Chiang Mai, 2023), Fr. Gustavo Agín, Superior General, emphasized the need to plan support for religious who have up to 10 years of perpetual vows. In response to this request, the Gathering of Young Religious took place from July 18 - 21 at San Bernardino, Paraguay. The meeting was facilitated by Br. Fernando Kuhn, a theologian and Clarétian religious, who reflected on the following question: How can we envision young religious life in the Congregation of Betharram today? The programme alternated between presentations and small group discussions, which allowed participants to share their experiences, aspirations, and challenges.

The Congregation as a Tree

Fr. Fernando proposed understanding consecrated life in Betharram using the image of a tree. Indeed, the Congregation is no longer that small mustard seed planted by St. Michael, but a large, flourishing tree, composed of:

- **The roots**, which consist of the charism and spiritual heritage.

The deeper the roots, the stronger the tree.

- **The trunk**, whose robustness gives the tree strength. There may be wounds on the trunk, but if the roots are strong, the tree has a chance to grow again.
- **The branches**, leaves, and fruit, which allow the tree to withstand storms and challenges with a certain flexibility. Most congregations have wounds in their branches, leaves, and fruit. Some leaves are deciduous and grow back in the spring; others fall and do not grow again.

Some Challenges of Community Life

We religious are called to follow Christ in community (Rule of Life § 7), to bear witness to Christ through fraternal life. At the same time, the community is the context where various tensions arise: personal blocks, generational differences, cultural diversity, and communication difficulties, among others. Regarding this last point, Fr. Fernando identified four levels of communication:

From aggressive silence (level 0),

- to simple politeness (level 1),
- superficial remarks that contribute to a positive atmosphere but are insufficient (level 2),
- the exchange of ideas (level 3),
- and finally, full communion (level 4), where the interaction is respectful and fruitful.

Among the major challenges, Fr. Fernando also highlighted addictions (especially alcoholism) and mental health problems.

Four Gifts and Their Counterparts

In religious life, it is possible to identify four gifts and four corresponding counterparts:

1. Prophets: These are members of the community with great insight, who are ahead of their time and, for that very reason, are often misunderstood. **Counterpart:** Those who, having the insight of a prophet, and become overly critical pessimists or prophets of doom, because they failed to cultivate the gift of prophecy.

2. Leaders: These are the community's motivators, who must pay attention to the prophets, but also care for those who are struggling. They are often criticized from both extremes.



Counterpart: Someone who has (or thinks they have) the gift of leadership, but, if not chosen, becomes a negative leader, who obstructs and divides.

3. Healers: These are attentive members who identify those who are hurting and care for them. It can happen that someone with the gift of healing prioritizes those who are struggling so much that they are unable to lead. **Counterpart:** Those who, having the gift of recognizing others' vulnerabilities, "poke the wound," re-open old wounds, and cause further harm.

4. The poet: These are religious members who bring joy to the community, contributing to a positive atmosphere (for example, by organizing celebrations, outings, etc.). **Counterpart:** Those who avoid work and difficulties because they over-emphasize the spirit of celebration.

Stages in Community Life

Brother Fernando identified three stages of the community experience:

1: Upon entering: This is usually a time of enthusiasm, with rules that govern community life and shared elements (studies, some pastoral work, equality among those in formation), and basic needs met. Except during difficult times, satisfaction tends to prevail, as expressed in Peter's words: *"Let us make three tents"* (Mark 9:5). In the words of Paul Ricoeur, we can call this stage "first naiveté."

2. Apostolic communities: Initially, there is enthusiasm, but soon difficulties arise, because relationships become more asymmetrical, there are differences in age and roles, and the number of activities increases. Four symptoms of these difficulties can be identified: 1) a gradual dis-engagement from shared activities (prayer, meals, sports); 2) a tendency towards individualistic pastoral approaches; 3) excessive autonomy

in the use of money and time; 4) a feeling of loneliness and the consequent search for substitute relationships or external sources of gratification. This stage can be critical, hence the relevance of Jesus' question to his community: *"Do you also want to leave?"* (John 6:67). In the words of Paul Ricoeur, this is the "second innocence," because it requires regaining a certain simplicity and renewing trust.

3. Celebration and forgiveness: After the miraculous catch of fish and the meal together (celebration), Jesus asks Peter three questions, reconciles him, and calls him again (forgiveness). Love is the key to recovering the simplicity of the early days.

The Crisis of Irrelevance

The complexity of the present time can lead us into a crisis, making us feel irrelevant and dispensable. In the past, a religious person, simply by virtue of being a religious, held a significant position in a school. Today, that alone is no longer enough. Protocols, which aim to protect people's well-being, can also hinder the religious presence in educational institutions. Socially, we are becoming invisible, and many people don't care about us at all. Even the most basic Catholic symbols are unknown to a



large part of society. Faced with this indifference, some religious people and movements react by clinging to the habit, the cassock, or Latin, in an attempt to strengthen their identity and regain lost prestige.

The Pedagogy of Incarnation in “Being”

When we contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation, we tend to focus on Jesus’ public ministry. However, we must not overlook his ordinary life and his presence in Mary’s womb. We are accustomed to imitating Jesus in action, and we often fall into activism. Sometimes, we need to pause, as Jesus did when he was on his way to heal Jairus’ daughter, but stopped because someone touched his cloak. We must learn to simply “be,” because people need men of

God: to talk to, to receive support in life and death, and to simply feel the presence of someone who listens and accompanies them.

Within this context, the Meeting of Young Religious took place, and it was very positively evaluated by the participants. They highlighted the insightful and engaging presentation by Br. Fernando Kuhn, as well as the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences. They also expressed their desire to continue this formation programme, which strengthens our “Here I am” response, solidifies our vocation, and helps us grow in humanity, so that we may be signs of hope in the world. ■



Fr.AE REGION

● On Sunday, August 10th, Deacon Óscar Alberto Mendoza Jiménez SCJ was ordained a priest at the Parish of Saint Joseph, Spouse of Mary, in the city of San José de los Arroyos, Diocese of Coronel Oviedo.

The celebration was presided over by Most Rev. Claudio Silvero SCJ, Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Encarnación, and concelebrated by: Most Rev. Ignacio Gogorza SCJ, Bishop Emeritus of Encarnación, Fr. Davi Lara SCJ, Regional Superior, Fr. Alberto Zaracho SCJ, Regional Vicar in Paraguay, as well as the parish priest and more than a dozen Betharramite priests, including some of Fr. Óscar's formators.

The day before, a city-wide mission was held, with the participation of around 150 missionaries from various works of the congregation throughout the country.

After the ceremony, a fraternal lunch was shared among those present to honor and celebrate the new priest.

May God bless his ministry, and may the Virgin of Betharram and our Father Saint Michael Garicoïts always accompany and guide him in his mission. ■



SMJC REGION

● On Saturday, August 9, the Vicariate of Thailand and Vietnam experienced a day of great joy. Two young Betharramites, Br. Anselm Prapas Chiwakitmankong SCJ and Br. Peter Do Van Hung SCJ, were ordained Deacons during a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by His Excellency Monsignor Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Bangkok.

The ceremony took place in the chapel of the “Mother of the Redeemer” Major Seminary in Bangkok, in the presence of confreres, family and friends.

During the same celebration, Br.

Paul Athit Jamo scj was instituted Reader.

To all of them go our heartfelt wishes for a fruitful and faithful ministry, in service of the Gospel and the Church! ■

During the meeting held on August 28th and 29th, the **Superior General**, with the advice of his Council, approved the following decisions:

St Michael Garicoïts Region

- **Restoration of the parish** of Isola and Roffia to the Diocese of San Miniato (Vicariate of Italy)

St Mary of Jesus Crucified Region (Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam)

- Appointment of **Fr. Biju Antony Panthalukkaran as Superior of the Community of Olton**, exceptionally for a third term, from August 28th (RL. 206 a & 277);
- Appointment of **Fr. Chokdee John Damronganurak as Superior of the Community of Huay Bong-Muangnam-Fang**, exceptionally

for a third term, from August 28th (RL. 206 a & 277);

- Appointment of **Fr. Suthon Bernard Khiriwathansakun as Superior of the Community of Ban Pong-Phayao**, exceptionally for a third term, from August 28th (RL. 206 a & 277);
- Appointment of **Fr. Tidkham Jailertit as Superior of the Community of Maepon** for a second term, from August 28th (RL. 206 a);
- Appointment of **Fr. Mongkhon Charoentham as Superior of the Community of Chomtong-Khun Pae** for a second term, from August 28th (RL. 206 a).

On 16 July, the **Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life** granted to **Father Gianluca Limonta** (Vicariate of Italy, St Michael Garicoïts Region) the

indult to leave the Congregation with a view to his incardination in the diocese of Parma.

Seventh journey to Rome

May 1891

Coming back from the Holy Land, after disembarking in Marseilles on April 30th 1891, Fr. Etchecopar did not go to Betharram, but took the train to Rome together with Fr. Miro. In his luggage, he carried an important load which he had to hand over to the Congregation of the Sacred Rites¹.

Let us go back for a while and let us say a few words about the Cause of Fr. Garicoïts².

Any beatification Cause starts with a diocesan Trial, called "ordinary", followed by another Trial in Rome, called "apostolic". The ordinary Trial is an "informative" one, in which the first testimonies about the life, virtues and sanctity fame of the Servant of God are collected, and it occurs in the diocese where he comes from. In our case, the diocese of Bayonne. The Ordinary Trial for the Cause of Fr. Garicoïts was

officially opened on August 3rd 1886 in the chapel of Bayonne bishop's house. The Postulator of the Trial was a Dominican, Fr. Ligiez, residing in Rome, who in his turn named a Vice-Postulator residing in Bayonne, the Betharramite Fr. Miro. A hundred and forty nine witnesses were heard, some of them were in Paris.

On September 16th 1890, the Trial was closed and Fr. Miro was nominated to bring the authenticated acts of the depositions to the Congregation of Sacred Rites in Rome³. However, Fr. Etchecopar wanted "*these so glorious documents*" to be deposited in the grotto of the Nativity in Betleem and on the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem. A "small" detour, which Fr. Etchecopar considered necessary, as for "sanctifying" those writings, and as an invocation to obtain from God the grace of a prompt, positive ending

1) See NEF of July 2025. In this article, an error must be corrected : the Acts brought to the Holy Land, then to Rome, did not concern St. Michael's writings, but the depositions of the Ordinary Trial.

2) An interesting, detailed history of the Cause was published in several articles of the Echo of Betharram in 1926-1927.

3) At that time, it was the Roman Congregation which was in charge of the Cause of Saints.

of the Cause. So our two pilgrims, Fr. Etchecopar and Fr. Miro, coming back from the Middle East with the precious suitcase, of the Acts of the Ordinary Trial, travelled to Rome by train, arriving on May 4th, and were accomodated in *Saint-Louis-des-Français*. The town was passing through a difficult moment. A few days earlier, on April 23rd, a military powder magazine where thousands of heavy calibre shells were stored, had exploded, destroying the town in many places. *"The powder magazine which exploded has shaken the whole town, and caused everywhere damages of thousands and hundred of thousands of francs, principally in the Vatican, in Saint-Peter and Saint-Paul-outside the Walls. The cause of this disaster is unknown. But God is here, how we must redouble our prayers, principally during this month of Mary !"*⁴

On May 6th, Fr. Etchecopar wrote to his Assistant, Fr. Bourdenne, that the Acts of the Ordinary Trial had been deposited at the Vatican. *"Let us thank God and his Very Holy Mother... Offer up all to the very Holy Virgin the warmest acts of grace"*.

This journey was also the occasion, for the Superior General, to give a decisive thrust to the launching of the Apostolic Trial. As in all things, included for the cause of St. Michael, it was fundamental to choose the good persons to reach the aim. Fr. Etchecopar had the occasion of consulting several persons, in several meetings with Cardinals Zigliara, Masella, Mermillod... Cardinal Zigliara accepted to be the *"Ponente"*, that is to say the Reporter of the Founder's Cause⁵. Following the advice of Fr. Ligiez, the priest Angelo Mariani was chosen as an advocate to make the Cause proceed. Fr. Etchecopar offered each one a copy of Fr. Garicoïts biography.

On May 10th, Pope Leon XIII received him in an audience. A detailed circular letter describes the interview with the Holy Father entirely. *"Very Holy Father, I have come to Rome in order to deposit at the feet of Your Holiness the Trial of Fama Sanctitis of our Founder; I beg you to deign accepting a copy of his life"*.⁶

The following days, Fr. Etchecopar went at least twice to the Congregation of Sacred Rites to meet the Prefect,

4) Letter of May 9th to the Prioress of the Betleem Carmel.

5) The « Reporter's » role was to present to the Congregation of Rites a report about the Cause, by being its spokesman and principal defender.

6) The only biography available at that time was *Vie et Lettres du R.P. Michel Garicoïts*, by Basilide Bourdenne scj, Vignancour, Pau, 1878.



Cardinal Gaetano Masella, and other official persons of this Congregation, notably to certify the authenticity and integrity of the seals on the Acts of the Ordinary Trial. *“The Holy Father has already granted the ten years’ limit during which the trial of our founder should have been left closed since it was transmitted to the Congregation of Sacred Rites ; then, nothing seems opposed to its opening and the beginning of the exam works in a very short time”.*⁷

At last, on May 18th, Fr. Etchecopar

and Fr. Miro went back to France and arrived in Betharram in the afternoon of May 21th. For Fr. Etchecopar, it meant coming back home after being absent for nearly six months. But the untiring traveller was not yet ready to stop. A few months later, a new journey was waiting for him, this time on the other side of the ocean.

Roberto Cornara

7) Letter to Fr. Bourdenne, May 13th 1891. Fr. Etchecopar’s optimism, however, had to face the long delays of Rome and some bureaucracy. In fact, before the Apostolic Trial, all the writings of St. Michael had to be collected and analysed, a work which lasted several years. It is only after Fr. Etchecopar’s death that the decree certifying that the writings of Fr. Garicoïts were orthodox arrived in Rome, and so it was possible to proceed to the introduction of the Cause and the beginning of the Apostolic Trial.

“ Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, [...] reached out to both men and women without distinction; he gave his life on the cross for everyone, showing that “there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15.13). ”

*Rule of Life nr. 29
(picture: Fr. Sebastián García scj)*



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