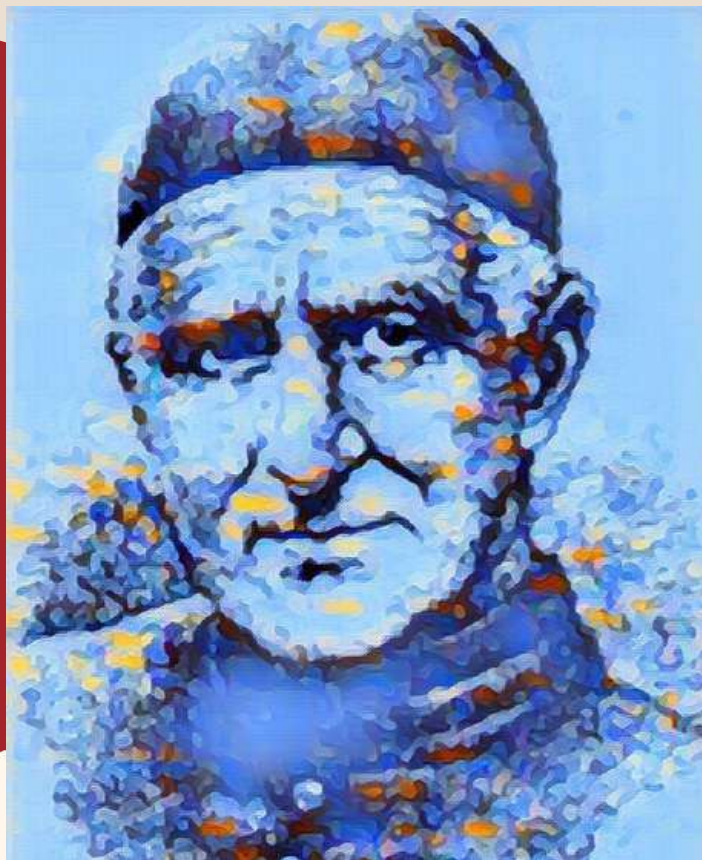


“

God always rewards and guides those who seek Him with a pure heart.

(DS 259)

”



Nef

2025

Nouvelles En Famille



Societas Sacratissimi
Cordis Jesu

Bethlehem



Walking together for the
care of the young, and
vulnerable people

In this issue

Walking together for the care of the young, and vulnerable people – Fr. Eduardo Gustavo Agín, Superior General	PAG. 3
From the address on February 24, 2019 – Pope Francis	PAG. 7
The commitment of the Congregation – Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj	PAG. 8
Learn how to welcome victims – Fr. Laurent Bacho scj	PAG. 10
Testimony from a Listening Unit Member – Marie-Claire	PAG. 12
Mature interpersonal relationships: abuse prevention and formation – Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez scj	PAG. 14
Attention to the best interests of children and young people in schools: example of the 'Colegio Sagrado Corazón' in Rosario – Mr. Héctor Gustavo Dimónaco, Principal	PAG. 16
Notices – General Council	PAG. 20
† Fr. Mario Bulanti scj – Fr. Angelo Riva scj	PAG. 22
† Fr. Pierre Leborgne scj – Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj	PAG. 24
Fr Etchecopar's travels: second travel to Rome – Roberto Cornara	PAG. 26

Generalate House

Via Angelo Brunetti, 27
00186 Rome (Italy)
Phone +39 06 320 70 96
E-mail scj.generalate@gmail.com

FOR INTERNAL USE

send Fr. Etchecopar to Rome again with Fr. Magendie.

We know little about this second trip. Fr. Etchecopar's letters, usually rich in details and personal considerations, are here rather meagre and essential. The two travellers arrived on September 21 in the Eternal City, *"ever more desolate under the blows of the revolution, still motionless on the rocks of Calvary"*.¹ The allusion to the end of the Papal State is still evident when he writes: *"There are always pilgrims who follow one another to Rome: so we pray, we devote ourselves; the triumph of the Church will come; in the meantime Hell spreads its ravages everywhere!"*²

During his stay in Rome, he had the honour of being introduced to Card. Antonelli, Secretary of State of the Vatican. But above all he was received in a private audience by the Pope: *"The most precious of our consolations has been the paternal welcome of the Sovereign Pontiff. I had not yet had the honour, dear Fathers and Brothers, of being admitted officially at his feet, as a representative of the Congregation."*³ This audience

was the subject of a brief article in the *Osservatore Romano*, the newspaper of the Holy See. We do not know exactly the reasons for this second trip, which had to do with various details of the life of the Congregation and the revision of the Constitutions. We also know little about the places and people they met in Rome. Certainly, in addition to the Secretary of State, Etchecopar and Magendie also met officials of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious, and especially Fr. Bianchi, Betharram's trusted man in Rome. *"The Most Reverend Fr. Bianchi shows himself to be very kind. He receives us almost every day and answers our questions. May the good Lord reward him."*⁴

On October 2, the two travellers left Rome. For Fr. Etchecopar, it was only a "see you again" to the Eternal City; because in fact, a little over 7 months later he would return there, for a purpose that would be decisive for the definitive approval of the Congregation

Roberto Cornara

1) Letter to his sister, Sister Julie, 10 November 1876.

2) Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 2 September 1876.

3) Circular letter, 16 October 1876.

4) Letter to Fr. Pagadoy, 29 September 1876.

FATHER ETCHECOPAR'S TRAVELS

Second journey to Rome

September–October 1876

On July 23, 1875, the Holy See had granted the Congregation of Betharram the Note of Approval by which the institute was recognised as a Congregation of pontifical right. The Constitutions, however, had to be modified, corrected and revised to adapt them to Roman requirements. These were the instructions that Father Etchécopar had received in Rome during his first trip in October 1875.

'That put a lot of work on our plate. I would never have believed that there were so many changes to be made to the Constitutions', wrote Fr. Magendie on November 18, 1875. At the time, the correspondence between the Superior of Betharram and Fr. Raimondo Bianchi, procurator of the Dominicans in Rome, was becoming increasingly dense. The requests for information and clarifications that Fr. Etchécopar needed in the work of revising the Constitutions were numerous. "In Rome, we want to seriously strive for the best, but little by little, prudently. Therefore, patience and trust," he wrote to Fr. Sampay on April 3, 1876.

New comments from Rome required more reflections. *"The current wording was found indigestible in Rome; a new, more methodical one will be needed,"* wrote Fr. Etchécopar on the same April 3 to Fr. Jean Magendie, superior in America. In the circular letter of June 23, 1876, he communicated to the entire Congregation the changes to the Constitutions desired by Rome. These changes concerned the vows – and in particular the vow of poverty –, the superiors – their role and their residence –, the bursars – their role and that of their collaborators (the "providers") –, the novitiate and its regulations...

An important aspect concerned the status of what was at the time called the "Colony of America". Fr. Jean Magendie was in France in the summer of 1876. On September 1st, a meeting of the General Council took place and Fr. Magendie was invited to participate, to explain the state of the communities and the religious in Argentina and Uruguay. It was probably on this occasion that it was decided to

Walking together for the care of the young, and vulnerable people

**"Live as children of the light.
Now the fruit of the light is goodness,
justice and truth.
Be able to discern
what pleases the Lord,
and do not participate in the
unfruitful works of darkness,
but expose them."
(Eph 5:8b-11).**

Dear Betharramites,

Today I want to share with you a simple reflection on the need to assure *safe spaces* in every place where Betharram is located. They are meant for every person who walks with us, whether a minor, a youth or an adult, and especially for those who are in a *vulnerable situation*.

Since I was a child I grew up under the attentive care of the religious of Betharram. At the school of the Sacred Heart of Barracas, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Sometimes I wonder if I should feel lucky or especially blessed by God for having lived like this, protected, loved, educated. I also wonder: why did I experience this and others had to go through serious experiences of pain and affliction? Victims of abuse ask themselves this question throughout their lives: why did this happen to me?... The subjective damage they suffer is terrible and traumatic. And very difficult to repair in many cases.



Lately the congregation has had to face a harsh reality. For today we are facing an uncomfortable truth, as we discover a wound in the heart of our religious family. It is true that for some years we have been reflecting, together with the Church, on the cases of abuse that affect the majority of dioceses and congregations (especially male ones), but it is only now that we have felt it definitively in our own body. Our Congregation is closely following a pathway of recognition and reparation along with the victims of abuse, in particular in the Vicariate of France-Spain. It is a slow and painful process, especially for those who say they have suffered such abuse, but also for us as religious, when we discover ourselves implicated in such a complex and devastating situation. Many feelings emerge, such as shame, anger, dismay...

The issue of abuse, and the bad behaviour of several of those responsible, as we all know, has been emerging strongly for some time, both in the Church and society. What was previously unseen and unspoken now became visible... Suddenly, things were no longer hidden but were coming to light. The Church of the third millennium had to open itself decisively to a multitude of cases of abuse that initially referred to sexual abuse, but little by little other forms of abuse appeared, such as: abuse of power, abuse of conscience and so-called spiritual abuse, which often morphed into the first kind.

So I share some reflections on the consequences of this profound evil that has left people broken and has caused wounds that are still open in the Church.

This painful process was seriously addressed by the Church from the beginning of the century, but above all I recall here «the Meeting for the Protection of Minors in the Church» from 21 - 24 February 2019 in the Vatican. People came who presented shocking testimonies of abuse before bishops, cardinals, religious men and women and lay people.

I quote some of the participants' opinions, which evoke some of the great mistakes of the past:

- Our failure to respond to the suffering of victims has wounded our people, leaving a deep wound in our relationship with those we have been sent to serve.

was rendered page 190! A few weeks ago, you were sorry not to be able to attend a meeting of veterans in Lestelle. The, now your walk has come to an end in front of Upper Jerusalem gates, it is where you can give thanks and we join you to thank the Lord for what He gave to us with you.

“Peace to those who love you”. Peace on you, these invocations of the psalmist, with you we take them back for our time, our world, our Church, our Congregation. You have shared, Pierre, your life with soldiers: wasn't it above all, for the increase of peace and happiness and that war and its misfortunes vanish? We rely on your prayer, may the Lord always arouse among us and around us partisans of peace and brotherhood builders. And may vocations of religious and priests happen, happy to leave everything to follow the Lord and to serve their brothers and sisters.

Our pain is big to be separated from Pierre, but, my Lord, our hope is even



bigger and in you we will remain united.

Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil scj

As the parish priest of Albonico with Dascio for over fifty years (from 1970 to 2023), Fr Mario was known for staying close to people. He was a rigorous man who carried out his

commitments with seriousness but also with a grateful heart, sharp wit, and humor.

Fr. Angelo Riva scj

† Fr. Pierre LEBORGNE scj

Pérenchies, 12 May 1932 • Bétharram, 24 January 2025 (France)

Pierre's death surprised us and we nearly feel like asking him: "Why Pierre?"

In his life the changes of mission were legion. He had within him a great strength and a generous spring to reply each time "Here I am" as a good Betharramite. Teacher, bursar, military chaplain, missions procurator, always ready to serve the others always ready to change outfit according to the task to fulfill.

Pierre has left everything to answer to the call of the Lord, becoming a Betharram religious and a priest, and what has he received? The company of so many religious brothers, students, soldiers, missionaries. When he launched a gathering of veterans of Northern Africa in Lourdes the pilgrims were double what was expect-

ed and since then their number is still increasing. Pierre, the one you have served with such a big heart offers, for sure, the eternal life promised for the future world.

"What a joy when I was told 'we will go to the Lord's house'" the psalm said. The time of his joy has come for you, Pierre, for sure earlier than you expected and that we expected. In spite of the health and mobility issues, you kept your mind awake. A week ago, you actively attended a meeting for the life of the Maison Neuve care home and you brought ideas to improve. As a former missions Procurator, you were so happy on Thursday when I brought to you two books on Betharram in China. What a surprise to discover on Friday morning, that the reading of the first book

- No leader can say to himself: 'This problem of abuse in the Church doesn't concern me, because things are different in my part of the world.' Each of us is responsible for the whole Church. As we address the scourge of sexual abuse, abuse of power and abuse of conscience together in a synodal way, we must do so with one shared vision. But we must also be capable of flexibility and compassion, arising from the diversity of people and situations we meet in mission.
- We are currently living in a state of crisis and shame, as we have gravely obscured the grace of the mission of Christ. Is it possible now for us to move from fear to trust, from scandal to truth? Can we remove the blindfolds that are born of our repeated negligence? What policies, programmes and systems will lead us to a new, revitalised starting point, marked by a transparency that illuminates the world with God's hope in us to build the Kingdom of God?
- I believe that our perspective changes radically when we have been able to empathise after we have listened directly to a victim.

As Superior General, I know how important it is not to walk alone in this matter. Every day along with Fr. Jean-Do (Vicar General & Congregation Safeguarding lead) we share everything related to this topic. What the "listening and accompaniment cell" is doing today in the Vicariate of France-Spain is very valuable in discerning and coping together with a critical situation. In the Vicariates where these cells are not yet organised, listening and accompaniment cells will be established.

Perhaps I, and each one of us, need a "*Copernican revolution*" of mind and heart, to stop thinking about how this affects us or how much harm it does to us, and to look at it from the victims' perspective and for their benefit. That is why we want to put the victims at the centre and not ourselves or our institute.

I remember having read in some history book that Saint Michael had once been the object of some attempted abuse by a priest, during his long journey towards First Communion. To him, who knew how to *transform* so many sufferings into opportunities to grow in holiness, we present all his children, religious and lay, for whom he gave his life in an exemplary manner.

And to all the Betharramites, I entrust this attentive care so that no one else feels threatened or disrespected when walking alongside us, but rather confident and serene *"like a child in its mother's arms"* (Ps. 131.2).

United always in the Heart of Jesus.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

Superior General

TO SHARE IN COMMUNITY:

1. In your pastoral journey, have you ever listened to the story of an abused person? What did you feel? What did that experience leave you with?
2. What concrete actions does your community or vicariate carry out in relation to the care and protection of minors and vulnerable people?
3. Do you feel committed to this pastoral mission. Why?

Despite the challenges, there were also joyful moments during that time: hikes up Mount Legnone and lessons held in a barn to escape potential bombings carried out by the "Pippo," a German plane that regularly caused significant damage in Colico and its surroundings every morning.

In October 1946, Fr Mario entered the novitiate, which took him to France for an entire year. Upon his return, he pursued theological studies at the House of Albiate Brianza, where he remained until the day of his ordination to the priesthood on July 1, 1951.

The following period was one of "deepening": earning a theology degree in Rome and then attending courses at the Catholic University in Milan, where Fr Mario refined the skills that made him a well-prepared professor and a thoughtful pastor. He later moved to Lissone to support the parish (his room was a cold garage shared with two other confreres), then to Colico, Gravedona, and back to Colico.

P. Mario was transferred on October 1, 2024, to Albavilla because his health was deteriorating. His training led him to perfect his skills as an educator: for a priest, it is not enough to be a teacher; one must also be

an educator, capable of conveying thoughts, concepts, and experiences, and of being an example. This made him a highly "sought-after" pastor (he carried out many assignments as a preacher in the parishes of Bassa Valtellina and Lake Como), as his superiors often and willingly entrusted him with ministry to assist parish priests who requested support from the Priests of the Sacred Heart in Colico. We can summarize the three pillars of his life as a professor and pastor: Latin, history, and the Word of God.

And his hobbies? The topmost among them was spending a few weeks each year with mountain and climbing enthusiasts. One of his proudest moments was lending his ice axe to Achille Compagnoni (the conqueror of K2) while they were roped together on one of his unforgettable climbing adventures.

Another passion that thrilled him and often brought him back to his hometown of Talamona was historical research aimed at uncovering the town's origins and its changes over the centuries. His involvement in local research groups was significant, contributing to various publications for which he dedicated much time to study and research.

† Fr. Mario Abramo BULANTI scj

Talamona, 26 May 1928 • Albavilla, 12 January 2025 (Italy)

As Fr Mario¹ himself emphasized, one day, despite never having served as an altar boy, he felt a “calling” that led him to Colico, to the Apostolic House of St. Teresa. It was October 1939, and Fr Mario was only eleven years old. Thus, it was at the Apostolic House that he continued his studies through to the classical high school level. He often recounted episodes from that period as if no time had passed; memories etched into his mind. For example, there were dangerous moments: like when he went to the Laghetto station to retrieve sacks of rice that some priests would pick up near Rho and surrounding areas and toss off the train to prevent them from being confiscated by the Fascist militia. Or when, along with Fr Ernesto Colli, he was caught in an avalanche of dirt and snow

dislodged by a bomb explosion while they were returning to the Apostolic House after completing duties assigned by their superiors.



1) Better known in the parish as Fr Abramo, his middle name.



Address of the Holy Father at the end of the Meeting “Protection of Minors in the Church”

Sala Regia, Sunday, 24 February 2019

EXTRACT FROM THE FULL ADDRESS, ATTACHED IN PDF WITH THIS ISSUE OF THE NEF:

We are thus facing a universal problem, tragically present almost everywhere and affecting everyone. Yet we need to be clear, that while gravely affecting our societies as a whole, this evil [the phenomenon of the sexual abuse of minors] is in no way less monstrous when it takes place within the Church.

The brutality of this worldwide phenomenon becomes all the more grave and scandalous in the Church, for it is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility. Consecrated persons, chosen by God to guide souls to salvation, let themselves be dominated by their human frailty or sickness and thus become tools of Satan. In abuse, we see the hand of the evil that does not spare even the innocence of children. [...] For this reason, the Church has now become increasingly aware of the need not only to curb the gravest cases of abuse by disciplinary meas-

ures and civil and canonical processes, but also to decisively confront the phenomenon both inside and outside the Church. She feels called to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of her mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the little ones and to protect them from ravenous wolves.

Here again I would state clearly: if in the Church there should emerge even a single case of abuse – which already in itself represents an atrocity – that case will be faced with the utmost seriousness. Brothers and Sisters: in people's justified anger, the Church sees the reflection of the wrath of God, betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons. The echo of the silent cry of the little ones who, instead of finding in them fathers and spiritual guides encountered tormentors, will shake hearts dulled by hypocrisy and by power. It is our duty to pay close heed to this silent, choked cry. ■

Protection of minors and vulnerable persons from sexual abuse

The commitment of the Congregation

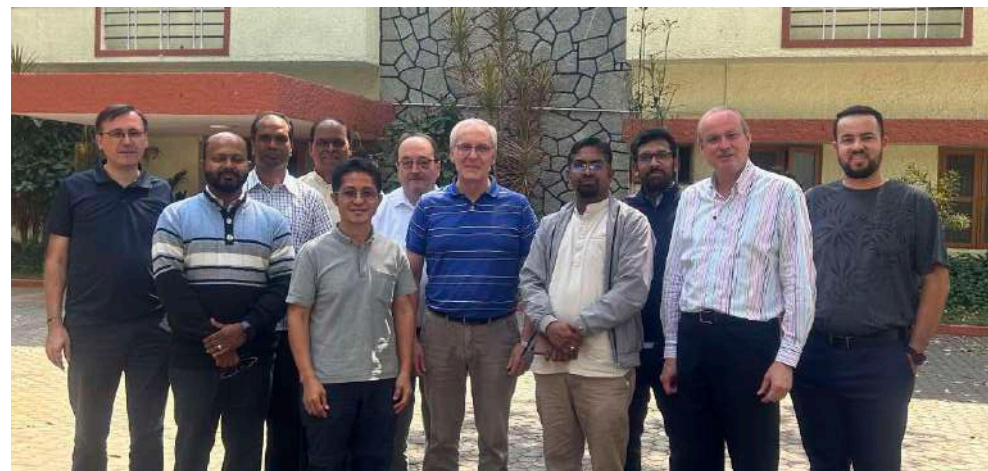
• Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj

The commitment of the Congregation for the Protection of minors and vulnerable persons remains a priority. The General Chapters of 2017 and 2023 gave strong lines: *"As a congregation, we solemnly assert our commitment to preserve the vulnerable persons entrusted to us"*. (General Chapter 2017, nr. 198). *"As a Congregation, we have committed ourselves to take care of and protect minors and vulnerable persons. The words of the victims lead us, with the whole Church, to get on the way of purification, acknowledgement and reparation. We condemn pedophilia, sexual traffics and abuses of vulnerable persons"*. (General Chapter 2023, nr. 198)

To this purpose, the Superior General, on March 19th 2021, issued a decree for the Congregation of Betharram: *"Leading lines to face up to situations of sexual abuse (Prevention and actions)"*. All the

communities are obliged to implement them. Therefore, in the initial formation of the religious, a formation is proposed in the different stages. In July 2024, during an international session in Betharram, a process of reflexion was proposed to the young religious of the Congregation of Betharram who were preparing for the final engagement, and to the formators of the whole congregation. It was animated by a psychologist.

In this month of February 2025, the Council of the Congregation, meeting in Bangalore in India, devotes a working day to check and evaluate the orientations of the General Chapter of 2023 implemented in the various realities of the congregation, and to go on organizing the formation to prevention to protect minors and vulnerable persons.



• Father Chan John Kunu scj, General Councillor, will regularly visit the Vicariate of India (*sine die*) to collaborate with the Regional Superior and his Regional Council while regularizing the situation of the Vicariate.

During this period, the Council of the Vicariate of India is replaced by a group of three religious who have been chosen after the assembly.

Namely: Fr Jose Kumar Johnrose scj, Fr. Rojo Thomas Kaviyil scj and Fr. Jesuraj Mariadas scj.

The process of regularization of the Vicariate will end with the appointment of a new regional Vicar and the return of the Vicariate Council composed of the superiors of the news communities.



**Our best wishes to
Br Alwyn Crasta,
new fully professed of
the Vicariate of India!**



CANONICAL VISIT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL (16/01 - 9/02) AND ASSEMBLY OF THE VICARIATE OF INDIA On 31st January and 1st February, the Vicariate Assembly took place in the presence of the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agín scj.

During the first day, a spiritual retreat was animated by Fr. Xavier Manavath cmf, Claretian, Episcopal Vicar for Consecrated Life in the Diocese of Bangalore.

On 1st February, Fr. Gustavo presented the report of the visit to the religious of the Vicariate.

On 2nd February, **Br. Alwin Crasta SCJ made his perpetual profession** in the hands of Fr. Gustavo, Superior General.

All these moments were also attended by **THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CONGREGATION**, who were present in India for the annual meeting.

THE SUPERIOR GENERAL WITH HIS COUNCIL in plenary session in Bangalore on 6 and 7 February, took the following decisions:

- Approval of the sale of three buildings in Bétharram (France);
- Determination of the regular contributions of the Regions to the fund of the Congregation;
- Determination of the limit beyond which regional superiors must apply for authorization regarding decisions of extraordinary administration ;

The reality of sexual abuses in the Church strikes our religious family.

Some testimonies and complaints of former pupils of the Secondary-High School *Our Lady of Betharram* state the fact of sexual abuses and/or physical violence perpetrated by some SCJ religious or lay employees inside the school.

The France-Spain Vicariate has undertaken a process of listening and reparation for the presumed victims, while cases have been turned over to the judiciary and the matter is taking its course.

A listening unit is established in the France-Spain Vicariate to welcome and listen to the victims of sexual abuses and physical violence committed mainly in the years 1970 to 1990. It works with the CRR established by the Conference of the male and female religious of France (CORREF) so that the victims of sexual abuses may be recognized and accompanied in their desire for reconstruction.

The unit has asked the ONG "IFDD" (Francophone Institute for Justice

and Democracy) to accompany the Congregation as a mediator, to prepare and animate an effective meeting with the victims who wish it. The first meeting took place on November 30th 2024 ; others shall follow to go on dialoguing with the victims. ■

In France, "the CRR (Commission Recognition Reparation)

takes into account the victim's words to appreciate the seriousness of the denounced facts, as well as the consequences of the undergone violence. Since the proof of the facts cannot be established, taking into account the oldness of the facts intimately and secretly suffered by a child, without witnesses and objective proofs, the restorative justice relies on the verisimilitude of a life account."

(From <https://www.reconnaissancereparation.org>)

Learn how to welcome victims

• Fr. Laurent Bacho scj

As part of the listening cell set up by the Vicariate of France-Spain, I would simply like to share my involvement in welcoming and supporting victims of sexual abuse committed mainly at the *Notre Dame de Betharram* School in the 70s-90s.

In November 2021, following the CIASE report¹, I participated in the General Assembly of Corref² which by unanimous vote of the 310 congregations, established the CRR³, to serve as a mediator between the victims and the congregations.

In January 2022, a complainant came to the office of the vicariate whom I directed to the CRR. Then came another 7 victims with the mediation of the CRR; for each of them there were long discussions in order to arrive at a protocol. A let-

ter of recognition thus emerged not simply administrative but a heart-felt letter with a commitment to financial compensation. In all these different cases, the religious perpetrators were deceased, but the Congregation, together with the entire Church, is engaged in a process of restorative justice even in these cases. During the year 2024, a group of victims of physical or sexual abuse filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor of Pau. Several victims of sexual abuse contacted the CRR. This required me to take a long and winding road, as I, like my brothers around me, was ignorant of all these events. But it was painful to have our blindness unfairly judged by the media as complicity. In the media frenzy, a lot of anger was directed at the vicariate because the media implied that

faithful to our mission of Evangelising, understanding in fidelity to the teaching of Pope Francis that:

“Evangelization is more than just simple doctrinal and moral transmission. It is, first and foremost, witness — one cannot evangelize without witness — witness of the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word in which salvation is fulfilled. An indispensable witness because, firstly, the world needs “evangelisers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with” (EN, 76). It is not transmitting an ideology or a “doctrine” about God, no. It is transmitting God who is living in me. This is witness. Also because, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (ibid., 41). The witness of Christ, then, is at the same time the first means of evangelisation (cf. ibid.), and an essential condition for its efficacy (cf. ibid., 76), so that the proclamation of the Gospel may be fruitful. Be witnesses.” (Audience of 22 March 2023) ■

1) *Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l'Église [Independent commission on sexual abuse in the church].*

After two and a half years of work, the CIASE, established since 8 February 2019, released its report on 5 October 2021, called “Rapport Sauvé”: Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church, France 1950-2020, October 2021, available on www.ciase.fr, English translation included.

2) *Conference of religious men and women in France.*

3) *Commission Recognition Reparation.*

from an educational-pastoral perspective to establish a Culture of Dialogue and Encounter. We start from the principle set out by St. Paul in the letter to the Philippians: *"Having the same mindset as Christ Jesus"* (Phil 2.5) in our conduct of educational ministry is a concrete way of living the commandment of Love in our Institutions.

In this regard, we developed the following concrete actions:

- A coherent philosophy for our Schools that views Education as a Life Project for the fullness of Life, in harmony with the Protocols and Instructions proposed by the different Ecclesiastical jurisdictions through the local Ordinary where we carry out our mission.
- Guidance of our Headteachers and class teachers in their daily lives in a creative and believing outlook, from principles, reflection, criteria of discernment and guidelines for action, with the accompaniment of religious, plus a Pedagogical Coordination for all our schools.
- Achievement, (after synodal style work among all the com-

munities) of a Code of Ethics for all the personnel who are part of our staff.

- We promote, as Father Sergio says in the introduction to the Code: "a method that seeks to promote in our communities a Culture of Encounter and the care of our Common Home, knowing that it is fundamental to the task of Education and Evangelisation to have a community climate where the values of the Gospel are lived."
- The practice of cordial reason shows how good communication reveals an ability to have open debate about what is true and just.
- We strive for this and for commitment as missionary disciples in all our educational and pastoral actions. "We believe that an educational institution that favours personal and community growth and fidelity to its founding values, is a space for growth that will generate a culture and a history in which Jesus Christ is the centre of its proposal for human development"

With these actions briefly stated above, we feel that we are being

we were all corrupt and were paedophiles too. And I felt also a deep shame in my various relationships with the outside world.

But then, after reading the various victims' statements made to the CRR, it made me feel quite sick, especially and painfully because it implicated certain religious that I had known as elder brothers, some of whom I had respected and appreciated.

Meeting with several of the victims was decisive. I reflected on the suffering they experienced during these attacks... a suffering which had continued even for 40 years, to the point of requests for debaptism, rejection of the Church, and even suicide attempts.

Of course, I find it extremely painful, having heard what effects this has brought about, in thinking that this institution founded by Saint Michael Garicoïts could have been such a place of sinister perversion. But my suffering doesn't compare with theirs.

My conviction is that my pathway as a religious must necessarily take into account these odious acts that have ruined lives. Without this, how

can I continue to proclaim in the Founder's manifesto, the founding text: to follow Jesus who *"puts himself in the place of all the victims"*.

Recognition is necessary; it often helps to alleviate suffering and purify their memory.

Financial compensation is a way of acknowledging that we take seriously their chaotic journey, and is a form of contribution to the sessions with psychologists or psychiatrists that this may have occasioned.

This journey is costly; between brothers of the vicariate we openly and honestly shared our dismay last year on May 14 and December 20, in the presence of a Franciscan facilitator. This sharing did not resolve everything but allowed us to move forward.

I do not want to forget that this journey has enabled me to meet, in particular, among our mediators of the CRR and the IFJD⁴, competent, clear-sighted, patient people of great compassion.

After working through the anger and the shame, the path of meeting the victims to be undertaken with courage even when we feel there is manipulation and weap-

4) Francophone Institute for Justice and Democracy.

onisation of this human suffering. I am on this path, finding sometimes that the event of the 3rd day is slow in coming.

During our last meeting in Paris on January 15, a Sister presented our current challenge well: *"to continue*

the path of our consecrated life not despite these events but from these events".

This requires much humility; the hope of this holy year challenges me. ■

Testimony from a Listening Unit Member

• Marie-Claire

Through these few words, I would like to share with you my experience as a listener to individuals who have been victims of sexual abuse within the Church. As a lay person, I was appointed by the bishop of my diocese when the listening unit was created, along with two other people.

I would like to begin this testimony by recounting a moment from this mission that deeply affected me. It was a phone call from M..., who was 88 years old at the time:

"Hello, thank you for answering my call. I don't want to end the year without getting this off my chest, something I've been carrying for so long. This story has resurfaced with all the media coverage, and tonight, I'm feeling anger."

We received this call at the listening

unit on New Year's Eve.

I decided to call her back immediately. We couldn't leave her alone that evening.

"Hello" I heard the voice of an elderly woman—a voice filled with a long-held silenced pain; a pain suppressed for too long. She spoke, putting words to her woes. At last, her voice was freed.

This elderly woman, a victim of both spiritual and sexual abuse by a priest in the 1940s, had carried this secret alone, with guilt and shame. At the end of her life, she was reflecting on how this had completely stifled her relationships, her emotional and family life. "I put a lid on it," she said, describing two halves of a broken life. How could she piece together what had been broken in two?

synergy with those committed to offering them opportunities and safe places in which to grow up peacefully."

Here we find in this teaching of Pope Francis a true pathway of human development so that in our schools there is a climate of attention to the best interests of children and adolescents, which is achieved if we are able to carry out the following actions in the Betharram school network, name-

ly:

- to awaken our consciences;
- to practice closeness and genuine solidarity;
- to build trust and synergies;
- to offer opportunities and safe places;
- to [help] grow up in security.

In this pathway of growth in humanity and quality of life, we work



of sexual abuse (2021) establish that *“awareness of the problems of sexual abuse (as well as those of power and conscience) must begin from the first stage of the initial formation of the religious of Betharram, and continue during all the subsequent stages of formation”* (§ 6.2). The last General Chapter expressed itself in the same pathway, assigning to the formators

the responsibility of addressing this issue (Acts § 199.f). Indeed, to conclude: dealing with these issues openly is the key to prevention; silencing them, on the other hand, will not be a good choice. ■

Attention to the best interests of children and adolescents in schools: example of the ‘Colegio Sagrado Corazón’ in Rosario

• Mr. Héctor Gustavo Dimónaco,
Principal of the *Sagrado Corazón* (high-) school in Rosario (Argentina)

Starting from reality, the Holy Father Francis stated at the General Audience last Wednesday, January 15, 2025, in the Pope Paul VI Hall:

“Child abuse, of whatever nature, is a despicable act, it is a heinous act. It is not simply a blight on society, no, it is a crime! And it

is a gross violation of God’s commandments. No child should be abused. Even one case is already too many. It is therefore necessary to awaken our consciences, to practice accompaniment and genuine solidarity with abused children and young people, and at the same time to build trust and



What struck me in the accounts of those who have suffered sexual abuse is the buried wounds—unspeakable, unthinkable pain that I could never have imagined until I came close to it. These wounds are buried for decades, often 40 years or more (that’s about the average), silently working their way through an entire life.

During these meetings, where there were always two listeners present, our role was to give our full attention, to be completely available to the person speaking. It meant being fully present to them with kindness, grounded in ourselves, yet entirely there for them, offering a quality presence. It required a 180-degree openness of heart, but also our minds alert and ready to understand.

It also meant granting total credibility

to their words. They had a vital need to face people who believed them.

But above all, I want to testify to the path of light we witnessed. It wasn’t all “darkness”; it was a liberation! Their faces were not the same before and after the listening sessions. We witnessed many tears, extreme tension, but at the same time, we saw closed spaces begin to open. As their words were freed, a new breath emerged. It was like perceiving a light bursting forth from the spoken truth. Even though the stories they shared were dramatic, the act of listening was not—it was intense, certainly, but it carried a power of liberation. It was solemn but not sad!

When I reflect on those moments of listening, I understand the strength of this verse from John (3:21): “Whoever

lives by the truth comes into the light." I would even say, "Whoever lives by the truth ... brings forth light." I am also reminded of the scene of Lazarus's resurrection (John 11:43): "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus cried, and the dead man came out—not as a dead

man, but as someone alive.

In this jubilee year, may Hope illuminate the hearts of those who have been victims of abuse.

January 2025. ■

Mature interpersonal relationships: abuse prevention and formation

• Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez scj

In recent years, the surfacing of various forms of abuse has led us to ask ourselves why it happens and how can we prevent it or correct it. Undoubtedly, Betharramite initial formation has a word to say on this subject. The subject is delicate and complex, and therefore requires clear discernment and continuous evaluation of current norms and practices.

First of all, it is worth noting that the person being formed is, in a certain sense, in a vulnerable situation in relation to the formator. By definition, the relationship between the two is asymmetrical. The formator must be aware of this, in order to avoid an abusive exercise of power. As was recently noted at the Session of Forma-

tors held in Betharram (July 2024): "*In order for this not to happen, it is necessary that the formator be well prepared and that there be a formation community that accompanies him in the service of formation. In fact, a concentration of power favours its abusive exercise*" (Session of Formators, Betharram, 2024, § 3.4).

It is therefore necessary to permanently review the practices of the formation community, especially those related to the exercise of power. This is fundamental, not only to safeguard the self-worth of the person being formed, but also because the way in which authority is exercised has a pedagogical value (generally hidden or unintentional). In other words, ex-



ercising power in an abusive or arbitrary way transmits, in a hidden way, a profound disvalue.

In our formation field, the Ratio Formationis conceives formation as a path of maturation. This pathway proposes, among other things, to form balanced, consistent and free personalities (R.F., § 2). More specifically, regarding the vow of chastity, it is established that the person being formed will be invited to "*grow in human maturity by accepting his/her sexuality on the psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual level*"

(R.F., § 27). To this end, there are various resources, among which spiritual accompaniment (R.F. § 67.2) and the use of tools from Psychology (psychodiagnostics, psychotherapy, etc. –R.F. § 164.e–) stand out. Likewise, different evaluation sessions and requests for information are foreseen (RF § Annexes IV to XI), in order to assess the person's suitability and identify strengths, limits and possible warning signs. For its part, the Guidelines of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons from situations