

*News bulletin of the
Congregation of the
Sacred Heart of Jesus
of Betharram*

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That evening the Bishop reminded them in a most direct fashion of his idea of a Betharram congregation. After saying a few words of encouragement to the companions, now orphaned, he stated once more that perpetual vows were optional and not obligatory and that any attempt contrary to these arrangements, either past or present, were "but the result of a holy illusion". A holy illusion: any attempt at changing the Constitutions or of introducing a measure of autonomy or even the obligation of pronouncing perpetual vows was but an illusion; St Michael's idea was an illusion, a holy one to be sure, but nothing more than an illusion!

Great was the emotion among the Betharramites, but when dealing with the plans and works of God, "holy illusions" can become a reality. That very same evening, Fr Auguste Etchecopar was appointed general secretary of the General Council by the Bishop. And it is thanks to this unswerving deeply religious man, to his patience and to his steadfastness, that St Michael's project finally won the day. Twelve years later the Congregation was recognised by Rome and placed under the protection of the Holy See.

A History of the General Chapters

voted: of the 21 present, 20 were in favour of the South American mission and thus began the Betharramite epic in South America.

On the other hand, the assembly summoned by Mgr Lacroix on the evening of St Michael's funeral, 16 May 1863, was much more dramatic. Fr Garicoits had died without seeing the realisation of his dreams: the Congregation was only an Institute of diocesan right, because the Bishop to whom he had promised lifelong obedience and total fidelity had always been opposed to recognition by Rome. The Congregation was closely linked to the diocese; furthermore many of the religious were disappointed by the veto imposed by the Bishop to pronounce perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which were not compulsory.

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(Continues)

NEF



Family News

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**A word from the
Superior General**

A shoot shall come forth from the stock of Jesse (Isaiah 11, 1)

In this issue

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**110th year
10th series, nr. 67
14 January 2012**

I have spent the last two months in England. I have become aware of how fragile Betharram is in England; this reality is composed of 12 religious, six priests and six brothers. Three of the priests are over 80 years of age, two others are 61 years of age, one of whom is in poor health; we have asked the youngest of the six, Fr Austin, to continue as Regional Superior of Blessed Mariam Region. I must say that all are faithful to living their vocation with much attachment and hard work. Besides the responsibility for six parishes, three of the brothers have been named school chaplains while another is very involved in missionary activity; finally two other brothers devote themselves to community responsibilities. After much reflection we have appointed Vicar, Fr Wilfrid Perepadan who was recently ordained and who was one of the three Indian students to have done their Theology in England. True they are few in number but the spiritual life, community, congregational and missionary life are paramount. The English brothers have greatly helped the missions in Thailand and India and they are now going to reap the first fruits: Fathers Monkong and Wilfrid are going to



share in the life and mission of this Vicariate. It is obvious to our English brothers that soon they will not be able to look after more than three parishes by forming two or three communities, at least Olton and Great Barr.

But the best news was told me by Father Austin: a group of Betharramite spirituality could be formed to study our charism in depth and propose it to the youth and other laity. Father Austin and Brothers Andrew and Gerard would take part in it helped by the two priest-religious who have been integrated into the life of the Vicariate. This pastoral aimed at adults is that of modern times, that of the new evangelisation. It is the very pastoral of Jesus with his disciples. We may not know all the details but it is sure that Father Garicoits spoke about his hopes and charismatic experiences with his first companions and he so encouraged them that they left everything, including their parishes so as to be part of his project such as the transmission of the faith and charism.

The spirituality of the Advent season allowed me to contemplate joyously the beauty of the branch, with its sap firm, clear and full of life, the harbinger of a future so reduced in numbers (Is 11, 1). The England branch is not the only one; others are already full of energy in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, France, Italy, the Holy Land, and the Central African Republic not forgetting the smallest in Ivory Coast, Thailand and India.

I think it is all going to depend on the love which we have for the charism left to us by St Michael and the charism for the youth. That is the love which is going to give us the force to suggest our charism to the youth as a road map for happiness as is our own case. Consequently, we must overcome all resistance linked to our way of life: the young know very well what they have to do with their lives; it is quite impossible to condition the freedom

A HISTORY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF THE BETHARRAM CONGREGATION

1. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLIES (1841 – 1874)

It was 40 years after its foundation that the Betharram Congregation was approved by the Holy See on 30 July 1875. In 1877 Rome gave a provisional approval of the Constitutions after protracted negotiations with the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr Lacroix. According to the Constitutions the Congregation had to hold a General Chapter every three years.

The pontifical recognition of the Congregation took place long years after the birth of the work desired by St Michael in 1832. From the beginning St Michael had adopted the custom of assembling the members of the Institution, principally when important decisions had to be taken together. There therefore exist traces of several *general assemblies* held in Betharram.

The first assembly of all the Betharramites took place on the morning of 10 September 1841. Fr Garicoits' first eight companions met at the Sanctuary for a Mass presided over by the Bishop and made their first vows: this is the day which is the official birthday of the Congregation.

Other general assemblies took place in 1851 and 1852. From a historical point of view the most important assembly took place on 16 October 1854. The Betharram community was summoned by St Michael to answer a question which was going to be a land mark in their history: would the Society accept the mission offered it in the Diocese of Buenos Aires? After scrupulously debating the question, in which all had to take part, the assembly

After the General Chapter celebrated in May 2011, this year we propose to examine, following the different General Chapters along the years, the pathway covered by the Congregation so far.

Edited by Roberto Cornara



2012

JANUARY

14	Feliz Aniversário	Ir. Glecimar da Silva
18	Feliz cumpleaños	P. Antonio Cano
19	10 años de sacerdocio	P. Crispin Villalba
20	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Victor Batailles
23	Buon compleanno	P. Ennio Bianchi
24	Joyeux anniversaire	F. Sylvain Keita Nguebata
25	Feliz cumpleaños 35 años de profesión	P. Luis Oteiza P. Sebastião Do Nascimento
26	Buon compleanno	P. Albino Trameri, P. Mario Giussani
27	Happy birthday Feliz cumpleaños	Fr. Brian Boyle P. Carlos Rodriguez P. Juan Pablo García Martínez
28	Happy birthday	Fr. Biju Paul Alappat
29	Joyeux anniversaire 25 años de profesión	P. André Grossard P. Francisco De Paula P. Vicente de Menezes P. Paulo Cesar Pinto
30	Buon compleanno	P. Celeste Perlini P. Aldo Camesasca

FEBRUARY

1	25 años de sacerdocio	P. Tarcisio Vera
2	Joyeux anniversaire 45 años de profesión	P. Jean Suberbielle P. Antonio Scarpa
3	Buon compleanno	P. Tarcisio Giacomelli
4	Feliz cumpleaños	P. Angelo Recalcati
7	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Firmin Bourguinat
10	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Henri Lataste
11	70 años de profesión	P. Julián Miguel
13	Buon compleanno	P. Mario Longoni
14	Joyeux anniversaire	F. Bertrand Belhartz F. Hyacinthe Ali Konan F. Giuseppe Pozzi
17	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Jean-Luc Morin P. Serge Braga Latta
18	Happy birthday	Br. Andrew Ferris

of choice of any youngster; no more than to go out looking for candidates to help keep our works going! How can celibacy be proposed to a young man today? Why run the risk of a row with the family of a young man who wants to be part of our family? These are part of the feeble excuses which make us down arms and talk of fatigue, disillusionment and resignation in the face of present day culture, of disinterest and especially a lack of joy and hope.

As Pope Paul VI wrote in number 80 of *Evangelii nuntiandi* talking about evangelisation, it is our right as it is the right of the young that Jesus Christ should be proposed as part of the charism. Not to do it would be a serious error of omission and, furthermore, would deprive the young of a serious choice of life precisely at a moment when he has to face a way of life. Pope Paul suggests three fundamental elements in the proposition:

- *Present the individual conscience clearly with the truth of the Gospel and salvation offered in Jesus Christ, and in full respect of other possible choices, far from being a threat to religious freedom, on the contrary, recognises it in truth.*

- *“Would it be a crime against freedom of expression to proclaim joyfully the Good News through the mercy of the Lord (Number 132) since his Son came into this world to reveal it to us by his word and life?”*

- *Why should lies, error, degradation and pornography have the right to be proposed unfortunately through devastating propaganda and the means of communication, taking advantage of legal tolerance, of the fears of men of good will and the influence of men of evil will?*

The weakened branches existing in each of our Vicariates ought to let us make an examination of conscience based



on this number 80 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. By enhancing and keeping what they are and what they profess, they must rediscover a spiritual enthusiasm, a strong proposal of our life style to others since it is something with which we are perfectly at ease. For us today these branches are signs of Providence which we must learn to recognise, just like the Magi who were guided by the Star of Bethlehem until they entered the grotto where the New Born babe was lying. In this way we can rediscover the rock, which is Jesus Christ, on which to construct our lives (DS 184).

Gaspar Fernández Pérez, SCJ

In view of the 150 anniversary of St Michael Garicoits' death, we will propose throughout this year some excerpts from his unpublished writings as a way to prepare us to live as best as possible this commemoration by drawing renewed inspiration from the spirituality of our Father and Founder...

Saint Michael Garicoits wrote...

Take a look at how well balanced our rules are. Apart from the vows they could all be practised by the laity; yes, the laity could observe our rules according to their own lights, at least through gratitude for all the graces they have received from our Lord Jesus Christ and as an act of obedience. Is it not even better that we should put them into practice, we who are under the obligation to obey them and have been called to a life of greater perfection?

“Heart speaks unto heart” and prayer is the guarantor of the heart. My life is going to assume its total dimension. How am I going to discover my deepest wish in agreement with Him, and in conformity with the wishes of God. How am I going to discover God’s wishes for me? The desire to love Him?

What are my impressions?

Enlightened by the presence of God in my heart I shall recognise this deep desire present in everyone, and kept alive by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I am therefore going to be open to that unique relationship of heart to heart; I am going to let God work in me so as to be conformed to Christ.

So, day by day and by easy stages I shall enter into the prayer of the “Ecce Venio”..... a prayer which will become part of my being. It is the great forward march! This is the interior fire to be kept permanently alive despite my weaknesses and my falls.

It will be like the texts of today’s Mass: “help us to find in your Word everything needed by our faith and we shall with purified sight discern your glory”

So I shall partake in God’s plan, like Abraham replying “Here I am” (twice) and helped all the nations of the world to give each other God’s blessing and the salvation of the multitude.

“God didn’t refuse his own Son but delivered him up for us”. And how am I to give myself over to that Love which is calling to me for God’s glory and the salvation of the multitude?

Benoît Loze
Fraternité Me Voici

Brief notes by a Betharramite Lay Associate

One of the founding members of the "Fraternité Me voici" established in France

20 years ago, Benoît Loze, with simplicity, has shared with us these brief notes taken down during one of the annual retreats organised by the Fraternité.

Through a few key-words and personal insights, he has drawn up an interior road map leading him little by little to better understand and take in a spirituality which he feels at home with.

We had a very good retreat with Jacky. There were 23 participants – 5 youngsters from Pibrac who came for the first day as they were busy in their parish on the Sunday for a diocesan activity.

It was a happy day of recollection plus the joy of seeing Fr Jacky again; there was also the fact that we were together again and that we made a few discoveries on the four lessons, within the opening Mass on Saturday, the teaching from the Transfiguration and the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer (the 4th lesson).

An opening based on the 4 adjectives from the introduction to the charter: where "me Voici" is an action which is:

HUMAN, man first and foremost, supporting the whole of humanity, obedient and generous, freed for God's service, living humbly, under the breath of the Spirit and co-creator!

CONSCIOUS, with a clear understanding and ready to accept events, an upright conscience thanks to the knowledge acquired with clarity and willingness.

DESIRED so as to let our deepest desires be expressed in our lives.

FILIAL. Just as a son accepts everything coming from his father, so to be a child of God means entering into salvation. Through the Son we know that we have been saved just like the Prodigal Son, on condition that we listen with the heart.

The second talk was based on Psalm 39, and the third one was on prayer.

You, who are precious for us!

Tonight I am happy to recall the words of St Paul with Fr Natale, Fr Simon, Fr Graziano and Fr Aldo.

23 years ago you arrived in our local church. To the communities St Paul said: "You are precious for us" (2 Th.2,8). We can all say how precious you are for us. Our words will not necessarily express it full but the presence of so many priests will be proof of it. The presence of God's people here assembled is the best proof of the esteem in which you are held and the gratitude which we feel towards you.

Words will not be enough to express our feelings, but we are grateful to the Lord for who you are; it has seemed to us that the charism, that gift from the Holy Spirit which your Congregation received from St Michael Garicoits, that is to be at the service of local churches in obedience to their bishops, we have seen it in action for the past 23 years. Dear confreres it is possible that we need religious to understand better the meaning of fidelity to the Lord, to the local church and in the local church the ability of being united to our bishop as a sign of unity, according to the Council. Referring thus to the bishop expresses our identity as church, especially the apostolic dimension which we come to experience painfully by times. This is why I can assure you that the pain of separation is not only felt by the bishop but is also felt by many priests.



Sermon preached by Mgr Francesco Cacucci, Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto during the farewell Mass for the Betharraite community at Bitonto on 30th October 2011.





You cannot imagine how since the news of your commitment elsewhere, how many priests have been edified by you during these years. Now we know that we form a single church, and we are thinking of the good of all the churches which are in need of breathing in this universal atmosphere. Consequently all the bishops should be anxious for all the churches; since as it is happening to you, dear Fathers, at the time when you are living your Pascal experience to come closer to the parishes and pastors; we can assure you that the experience of the diocesan and religious clergy showed us the benefits of this charism contrary to all individualism.

What you have done has been a help which we received as local church to understand better that isn't just one parish, that there isn't just one ministry. We must feel that we are at the service of the church. I want to note the richness of the experience lived here in Bitonto! Dear brothers and sisters, the route followed here has been a route blessed by the Lord, because it is a Church route. This is why tonight we ought to feel edified, priests and religious, for the good example is telling us that it is possible to live in truth and fidelity in the universal Church.

Physically, our brothers are leaving us with mingled feelings of regret because there needs elsewhere; and even though it is painful to leave you know that you are doing your duty. Such openness to the whole church, such openness to the needs of the brethren should be yours always, even if the departure is going to create problems, for individuals as for structures. Finally, once again we want to thank you! May the Lord bless you and give you the grace to live out your priesthood with the same enthusiasm as you have shown in your community.

American Region? What will you apply especially to your novices? - For some time now formation in South America has been improving with the accompaniment of the individual, trying to pay attention to all aspects of the person. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius have helped in developing this aspect. They have become the backbone of the novitiate. The novices discover that they can have a deep experience with the Lord, to get to know, love and follow Jesus, and on the strength of all this be able to make a choice of vocation. I shall want to be witness of all that God will operate in the hearts of these young candidates.

How do you see Betharram in the reality of the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay in the Fr Auguste Etchecopar Region? - I think that our Vicariate is experiencing an important moment which we must take advantage of. In a few days time we shall be having the Vicariate Assembly during which we shall discuss everything we have done since 2007, at the same time we shall finalise our project for the coming years. We are aware of our fragility, of how few we are and the vastness of our apostolic mission. This is why that this time of discernment, of listening to what the Spirit wants to tell us is exciting for me.

Finally, here are two questions put to you as a member of the last General Chapter: How did you personally live this congregational event? How do you see the Congregation as the result of this experience? - Personally, to have been present at the chapter will have been a unique experience. I was the youngest there and I had a certain foreboding. But I thank God for the fraternal atmosphere which reigned there. It was a consolation to discover Betharram under its different aspects, to see that the charism is still intact and open to all cultures. After this chapter I can see that the Congregation is open to internationality. This was one of the most striking things of the whole chapter.



Continues from p.7 ▶ **What could be the meaning for a South American like you to participate in the life and mission in Thailand before your final vows?** - That was an unforgettable experience which I cherish with all my heart. I was able to discover the Betharramite mission in dear Thailand. It was also the possibility of deepening the radical choice for religious life in Betharram. I am deeply grateful to the religious in Thailand for accepting me as one of them, especially Fr Pensa at Ban Pong and Chan, and at Sampran. I also had the chance of meeting Fr Lanusse at the close of his life. His decision to end his days in the land of his mission touched me deeply. It was the same with Fr Rodriguez who taught me so much about the mission... and in my own language!

How are you able to assume the double mission which your superiors have asked only two years after ordination? - It is true that it is a bit early to have to assure the double responsibility. I am depending on the words which Fr Gaspar said to me then: "The Lord will give you the grace to assume this responsibility!" For the moment I realise that I have a lot to learn!

You are just finishing a course on the formation of formators. Can you tell us something about it? - It all started with a few former students from the faculty of Psychology at the Gregorien who decided to open a school for the formation of formators in the light of the faculty. It is meant to give formators the basics in spirituality, theology and psychology. This institution is better known at the "School of Rulla", the Jesuit who founded the Gregorien. Besides the lectures which last three terms, the students are personally accompanied by a teacher during those three years. Through the frequent personal chats, the basics of the formation are absorbed by the individual in the different phases of his life.

What are the fundamental elements of this formation to which you will be particularly attentive in the Latin-

5 MINUTES WITH... Father Guido

NEF: What is of interest to our readers is how your vocation came into being and how you came to choose Betharram? - I am an old boy of San Jose College in Buenos Aires; it was there that, ever since I was a child I discovered the life of St Michael and the religious of Betharram. While I was at the College I was member of JU.BE (Betharramite Youth) where we would try to deepen our faith experience after the reality of our own lives. It was here also that after my secondary education I began to participate in the summer missions which the former Province of Rio de la Plata used to preach in Catamarca in the north of our country. It was while I was sharing the faith and the life of the very poor during those missions that I began to ask myself "What if I were to give my life up to announce Jesus Christ?" Soon after this call to religious life and the mission the answer came over loud and clear. Finally, while I was at University I was accompanied by Fr Agin and soon I asked to be admitted as a Postulant.

Can you tell us something of the experiences which impressed you most in the missionary community of Nueva Esperanza? - My time at Nueva Esperanza was really a time of grace. I was able to launch into the ministry at the heart of a community with the poor, in a place totally unknown to our geography books. There is no doubt that the greatest experience was that as a community we became aware of the important social problems facing the peasants of that area. That is how since the boom in the production of soja many of them have been dispossessed of their lands for the benefit of the farm industry and are forced to migrate towards the towns. In the face of such problems, the government turns the deaf ear. At the heart of such a situation our community tried to accompany the peasants in their demands for justice.



Father Guido Garcia is Argentinean; he was ordained priest in 2009. Ever since he was deacon he has been in the community of Nueva Esperanza. Last September he was named superior of the Adrogue community and Novice Master for the Etchecopar Region in place of Fr Daniel Gonzales, who had been named Regional Vicar for Argentina-Uruguay. Some will probably think that he is rather young to hold such a responsibility, but let's remember that Fr Garicoits had named Fr Etchecopar novice master when he was only 27 years of age!



Follows
on p. 10



*St Michael
Region*

Vicariate of Ivory Coast

New recruits ■ Started a few years ago, from its unassuming beginnings the poultry farm in Dabakala has been equipped with a modern building thanks to the support of benefactors and the determination of the community. On December 14, to mark this new stage, Fr. François Tohonon, superior of the Betharram community of Dabakala, blessed the new building at the presence of all the brothers. The next day, the farm housed hundreds of chicks, future laying pullets. This should help the community to support itself.

Vicariate of Italy

Council of the Vicariate ■ On Friday December 9 the Council of the Italian Vicariate gathered in Albiate. This first meeting after the General Chapter was an opportunity to make a roundup of the communities in Italy, before proposing any changes. All the community superiors were present; each one presented the situation of his own community. This exchange took a long time and showed in all the desire to work out a plan for the next 6 years. Good luck to all!

Vicariates of Italy & of the Centrafrican Republic

A Christmas tale ■ The Christmas missionary exhibition in the Parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Lissone, was something as different this year as a journey planned to make people reflect on a story: a very simple and real life experience of a common African woman. Ata Alice ("Grandmother" Alice) is an old woman living in a village belonging to the Betharramite mission of Bouar-Niem, in the Central African Republic. AIDS killed her daughter and her son-in-law, and Ata Alice is the only one to fend for her three grandchildren. She did not lose heart and, in spite of her old age, she took again to manufacturing terracotta jars following the special technique she had learnt when she was young; just three or four a week and she sells them at the market for next to nothing and earns a living for herself and her grandchildren. The exhibition tells the story of one of these jars, through the beautiful photos taken by father Beniamino Gusmeroli, and slowly leads the visitor to appre-

ciate a simple and fragile object in itself, but very precious because it is the symbol of the desire of liberation not only of Ata Alice, but of the whole African Continent, that fights for life by creating something beautiful.

Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar

January, a resting month ■ In the southern hemisphere, the month of January is the equivalent of "summer holidays" in Europe: many people go on holiday to the seaside, to the mountains, etc. However, some of us have decided to spend this month reflecting, praying and being alone with the Lord Jesus. Brothers: Eder Chaves Gonçalves, Marcelo Rodrigues da Silva and Francisco de Assis dos Santos will do in Brazil 30 days of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises as a preparation for their final vows.. Father Gerardo Ramos, searching for an inner renewal (in the middle of the course of his life), will have the same experience in San Miguel, in the province of Buenos Aires. The scholastics of the region, meanwhile, will do the 8-day annual retreat in Santos Martires, in Asuncion, Paraguay. Let's pray for them! May the Word become flesh in their lives and fill them with joy.

Vicariate of Thailand

Retreating... back to the origins ■ This year in November the whole Ban Garicoits community went to Ba-Pan-Poi (Northern Thailand) a mountain village, for their 8-day retreat. Fr. Jiraphat, the formator, was keen that this retreat should bring the Brothers back to their roots so some of the daily morning sharing was given by two of the elderly villagers. He also showed the brothers how to make their own 'hermitage' from straw collected from the rice field, so each brother had his own 'house'. The 40 inhabitants of this small village of 12 houses gave our brothers all the support they needed and attended some of their prayer sessions. Much time was given to silence in this beautiful place. The brothers all appreciated the simplicity of the experience, most of all the space to hear the word of the Lord without distractions. Could this simple style be a pattern for retreats elsewhere in the family of Betharram?



*Fr. Etchecopar
Region*



*B. Miriam
Region*