

from this date forward Betharram had no longer the right to exist; the Congregation was suppressed by the Government, the houses were closed, community life forbidden and the religious were obliged to leave their houses and scatter.

The only houses remaining were in Argentina and the one in Palestine; the Congregation had no more residences in France. In the space of a few weeks a lifetime's work was reduced to nothing. Countless communities, even those founded in the lifetime of St Michael were closed: Betharram, Bayonne, Orthez, Anglet, Pau, Sarrance. They were places rich in souvenirs, connected with the activity and mission of the Founder and of Fr. Etchecopar.

The final action in this attack against the Religious institutions took place on 14 August 1903 with the arrival of the Police at the Mother House Betharram to expel the religious "manu militari". At 19h40 of the same evening the Police Superintendent could make a triumphal announcement by telegram : "Building evacuated at 07.00 without too much difficulty thanks to the mounted police who kept the thousand strong crowd back,

crying: "Long live freedom!" and "Long live the Fathers!"

The sick were taken in by the families despite the heavy rainfall. Two hundred persons decided to wait. It was in this context that on 10 August 1903 in Irun in Spain the General Chapter opened, which was to be the most difficult in the history of Betharram. As a matter of fact the Chapter Delegates were invited to take all the necessary steps for the protection of the Institute and its works in France, so that Religious Life should be maintained and the future of the Institute assured as well as observance of the rules concerning formation and the studies of the rising generations.

by Roberto Cornara

To be continued ►

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Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

69
2012

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NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE
NOTICIAS EN FAMILIA
NOTIZIE IN FAMIGLIA
FAMILY NEWS

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

A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Good News

I can give you some good news: our Rule of Life, which was voted on at the last General Chapter May 2011, has been approved by the Holy See. Each religious and each community can thank the Lord for the gift of this new edition of our Rule of Life; as from now it will enlighten the path of our consecration to the Lord and our mission in the Church for the greater glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and for a better service of our fellow mankind.

What we Councillors living here in Rome have been going through since the 2011 Chapter in Bethlehem, reminds me of the ups and downs that Fathers Estrate and Bordachar met with when they came to Rome in 1875 with the Constitutions as they had been asked to do by Sr Marie de Jesus Crucifie. There were also the two journeys of Father Etchecopar to Rome to meet with Father Bianchi and make the necessary corrections to the Constitutions so that the Congregation could be finally recognised in 1877. In our archives we have the message sent from Sarrance to Father Pagadoy, his councillor: "I have just received, on

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CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS OF BETHARRAM

3 - The 1903 General Chapter

the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Brief approving our beloved Congregation. What a coincidence! A Mass of thanksgiving is to be celebrated! The Brothers and all who are not yet priests are to receive Communion once and recite the Rosary four times!" Consequently, the first thing I did was to give thanks in the Minerve church where Fr Etchecopar and the Betharramites used to say Mass whenever they came to Rome, so as to thank God for all the hard work put in by the revising commission through the years, the suggestions made by all our brothers, finally the vote by the 26th General Chapter and the final corrections made by the experts at the CIVCSVA. It was a long and tortuous approval. On the 1st July we presented the Rule to the CIVCSVA. On 17th September we received a reply according to which 23 corrections had been made, some were general others were particular; some were important others less so. Since one of the Commission assessors had told us that we had produced a good piece of work we were a bit disappointed with the answer. Like in Fr Etchecopar's time we had three meetings, the whole team together, with an under- secretary and finally with the Secretary of the Congregation, Mgr Tobin, C.Ss.R. We were always well received, listened to and thanked for the work done; we were also invited to correct one thing or another. And so it was that the approval was communicated to us on

22nd February 2012. The big stumbling block was the existence of the Regional Vicars. We could never get them to be considered councillors and Major superiors. They will therefore continue to be Vicar, and their authority, for want of being an ordinary one, is delegated as stated in articles 246 and 251 in the Rule. We could have the impression of having returned to the old delegation superiors; but by the very title of Regional Vicars whose powers are listed by the Rule of Life in articles 240, 249, 250 261 and 273, and in view of the experience of the past three years, the Regional Vicars have more authority than Vicariate Superior, while at the same time avoiding the creation of a fourth level of superiors. Another change which was necessary results from the fact that there can only be one council making decisions: the General Council. As for the Council of the Congregation, as stated in article 217, it can only examine, control, appreciate and indicate the means to be employed. We were also asked to specify the prayer for the dead, the duration of the postulancy, to be careful to distinguish between the function of the Bursar and that of the General Secretary. We were asked to make clear that former bishops returned to the Congregation would have no vote, nor right to vote in a Regional Chapter, similarly religious in temporary vows. Regional Councillors are to meet at least every three months; there cannot be more than

This General Chapter deserves special mention in view of its importance and the historical context in which it was held. In the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th particularly in the Latin countries of Europe and America the liberal society was waging a bitter battle against the Catholic Church and its institutions and especially against schools and religious Congregations.

In several countries of South America, as well as in Portugal, Spain and Italy laws were passed for the expropriation, confiscation and sale of Church property. The Bishops and Religious Congregations lost everything they possessed: schools, convents, churches, religious houses; only hospitals were spared; then some of them were banned by law, similarly Religious Life, or the simple fact of living in community, and finally religious vows.

In France in 1901 came the promulgation of the "Loi des Associations" which in itself was totally innocent; in order to be recognised legally, every cultural or religious Association had to request authorisation of the Government. The same request had to be made by the Religious Congregations which were considered like any other religious



Fr. Auguste Etchecopar

association. But the State found the means to refuse all Congregations on French soil the right to exist; all religious institutes which were not recognised were dissolved, their members obliged to scatter, their houses confiscated and finally sold. The same fate befell Betharram. The demand for authorisation deposited in Paris on the 18 September 1901 was rejected to 18 March 1903;

MARCH	
15	Joyeux anniversaire Happy birthday Fr. Paul Lamothe Br. Antony J. Livin Fernando
16	10 ans de profession F. Gilbert Napétien Coulibaly
19	65 ans de profession P. Jean Gillet
21	Feliz cumpleaños P. Bruno Ierullo P. Jorge Murias P. José Gogorza
22	Joyeux anniversaire P. Gabriel Verley
23	Buon compleanno Fr. Butrus Alhijazin Hno. Osmar Caceres Spaini
24	Happy birthday Br. Michael Richards
27	Feliz cumpleaños Hno. Daniel Pavón Galeano
29	Joyeux anniversaire Fr. Jean-Pierre Nécol
30	Happy Birthday Fr. Pairot P. Nauchachawan
31	Buon compleanno P. Piero Trameri
APRIL	
1	Joyeux anniversaire Feliz cumpleaños P. Jean Gillet P. Daniel González
2	Buon compleanno Happy birthday P. Angelo Riva Br. John Dawson Fr. Jiraphat Raksikhao
3	Buon compleanno 30 anni di sacerdozio P. Franco Cesana P. Ermanno Rasero P. Maurizio Vismara
4	Joyeux anniversaire P. Jean Casenave
5	Buon compleanno P. Tiziano Pozzi
6	55 years of priesthood Fr. Edward Simpson
10	Buon compleanno Happy birthday P. Aldo Nespoli P. Mario Zappa Fr. Subancha Yindeengarm
12	Joyeux anniversaire P. Gérard Badie P. Laurent Bacho
13	Buon compleanno P. Ugo Donini
16	Happy birthday Fr. Chanchai Temaroonrung

three members of a Regional Chapter named by the Regional Superior. We were also asked to restate articles 62, 200, 203,206, 207, and 241 in a language which is more canonical. Vatican II states: since the object and aim of religious life is the following of Christ as is suggested in the Gospels, we believe that this is the ultimate aim that all religious institutes should hold as their first rule. (P.C. 2a). It is on the basis of this first criterion, plus on four others, that the renewal of our religious family has been undertaken. Following in the footsteps of St Michael we want to live that life of Jesus, but above all else we want to reproduce and show the surge of the Heart of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, saying to his Father: "Here I am!" and abandoning himself to all the plans for the redemption of mankind (Rule of Life 2). Our present day rule is very different from the 1901 one: indeed the 1901 rule was very legal and the "Ecce venio" isn't even mentioned except in the section "Devotions of the Congregation" and this at the request of Fr Etchecopar, already deceased. It is possible that we attach little importance to the Rule since the Gospel means everything to us. But with that mentality there's not much point in preaching every Sunday nor trying to live out spiritual exercises nor upholding many other things. Our Rule of Life assembles the richness of our charism: the spirituality as well as the mission, it points to the demands



Fr. Gaspar

of our life style, regulates our mutual relations and shows us the criteria by which our conflicts are resolved. Most times those who are the least observant are the very ones who quote it to excuse their easy way of life. It is to be hoped that it will be a help for our personal and community prayer, for our community meetings and in our discernment for our mission! At the request of the 26th General Chapter and with the approval of Rome, our Institution will be called henceforth: *Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram*. Our route is well marked out; we have only to follow it faithfully and joyously so that the love of Jesus, humble and obedient, may be made known, announced, believed and loved by us and by the men and women close to us for the greater glory of the Holy Trinity.

Gaspar Fernández Pérez, SCJ

THE THAI COMMUNITY OF BAN GARICOÏTS MADE, A FEW MONTHS AGO, A SPIRITUAL RETREAT FULL IMMERSSED IN NATURE: THE YOUNG BETHARRAMITES, WELCOMED BY BRO. SAAT'S FAMILY, SPENT 7 DAYS IN THE MOUNTAINS, 7 DAYS LIVED IN THE MOST SIMPLE WAY AND IN AN INTENSIVE LISTENING TO THE LORD...

Back to the roots

The 40 inhabitants of this small village of 12 houses (mostly relatives of Bro.Saat) provided food, washing facilities and prayerful support. Fr.Jiraphat 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 who spoke about their own faith journey, and how they had first come to hear the good news of Jesus.

Fr.Jiraphat showed the brothers how to make their own 'hermitage' from straw collected from the rice field, so each brother had his own 'house'.

Much time was given to silence in this beautiful place and a large part of the day was simply spent in quiet reflection.

In mid-week Fr.Austin visited, along with Fr.Tidkham and gave a sharing session on the Ignatian style of prayer that was so much a part of the practice of St. Michael. The brothers were kind enough to give Fr.Austin a more comfortable hut!

Towards the end of the week there was a walking-with-Jesus pilgrimage of a whole day to the top of Doi Inthanon (1850 metres) led by guides from the village. All the villagers came to the masses and public prayers during



Saint Michael Garicoïts wrote...

We must study our Rules and regard them as coming from God.

Is it necessary to study our rules? Of course it is necessary to study our Rules, since they express the life style which we have embraced. We must carry them out and embellish them day by day, just like the building plan which we are called upon to build and to improve. On this plan we must reproduce our thoughts, our words, our feelings, our actions, in a word the whole of our conduct. It is by studying our rules with God's grace and by putting them into practice that we can acquire or restore in ourselves an exact idea of our life style.

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the Holy Trinity.

The love which unites the three persons of the Trinity and which makes them ONE is the same as the love which unites the spouses and unites them with God. Love cannot exist if it doesn't give of itself. Hence, married life is an exercise of gift and forgiveness. If their vocation is to show God's love to the world, it should drive the spouses to overcome their weaknesses.

Preserve and increase the graces of Christian Marriage despite our weaknesses.

For man sin is not a coincidence but let's admit that he is inherent to it. Isn't there a passage in the Scripture which says that man doesn't succeed in doing the good he wants but the wrong which he doesn't want? Sin is therefore the great spiritual weakness in man. Our mother the Church points to certain acts as against the dignity of marriage. These are adultery, divorce, incest and polygamy.

There are other weaknesses: • The regard of others and how it could be interpreted; • Relations with the in-laws are often a cause of friction • Professional work, the pursuit of money and honours are not always conducive to the dignity of marriage; • Relations with friends and colleagues can easily distract us from our home; • There are also physical aspects which can weaken a marriage, for example frigidity, impotence, sterility.

Be able to find in one's self but above all in God the resources necessary to lead a happy married life to strengthen the dignity of marriage and construct its greatness.

What's to be done when sin and human frailty creep into the couple? Better still what's to be done so that the situation never arises?

Some practical suggestions to persevere in marriage despite human frailty.

From a practical point of view how to persevere in marriage since it is indissoluble, no going back!

There is no backward movement – so forward march always! So to achieve this, here are a few practical suggestions:

• Prayer: Nobody can depend only on his own resources to persevere in marriage. We must ask for the help of God who is the origin of marriage so that he will strengthen us. At this moment it is important to take care of personal prayer in order to preserve our intimate relationship with the Lord, but also the prayer of the couple. It is a good thing to have a definite time, place, duration and periodicity for prayer together. This prayer should be carefully prepared; an annual retreat would be very useful for the couple too.

• Communication. It is best to keep the lines of communication open; this helps the couple to get to know each other better, to settle eventual conflicts, to express their love for each other and to get to know each other's needs so as to satisfy them if possible. It is capital to have time to be on their own, have quality time – an expression used by the Cana mission of the Chemin Neuf community.

Forgiveness: It is impossible for two individuals of different temperaments to live together without there being friction, hence the need for forgiveness. Do we not read in Scripture: "Let not the sun go down upon your anger"?

Sharing: At every level sharing is important to witness to God's love. This sharing should include questions of money. Sharing the body is also important. There should be no hesitation in changing our affections if we are to live in harmony.

Faustin Douh Aguei & Juliette Assienan-Kokola

LAY SPIRITUALITY

THE LAY ASSOCIATES OF ADIAPODOUMÉ (IVORY COAST) GATHER ONCE A MONTH TO PRAY TOGETHER AND SHARE ABOUT IMPORTANT ISSUES REGARDING THEIR CHRISTIAN LIFE. IN ONE OF THESE MEETINGS THEY PONDERED OVER THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE VIS-À-VIS HUMAN FRAGILITIES. WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE SUMMARY OF THEIR REFLECTION ON THEIR COMMITMENT AS CHRISTIANS, ON THEIR DAILY EXPERIENCE AND ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE 'HERE I AM' SPIRITUALITY.

The nobility of Christian Marriage in human fragility

In introducing this theme a contradiction is immediately to be noticed: In fact how can nobility be connected with fragility? How can greatness be found in someone laden with countless weaknesses? So what is there in this Christian Marriage to raise men and women and help them overcome their weaknesses, to better themselves and be sanctified? How is Christian Marriage noble and bearer of greatness? How does Christian Marriage enhance those who enter it, and how does it raise their human dignity?

Understanding Christian Marriage

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 1601) defines Christian Marriage: *The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptised persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.* We note that Christian Marriage is for life and is indissoluble. It comes down to saying like Christ and his Mother to God, and in the footsteps of St Michael Garicoits "Here I am", and for life. Marriage contributes to the well-being of the spouses. The greatest and most important is the mutual good of the spouses. On this point, what St Michael said about religious life is equally true for married life: "personal sanctification, aim for perfection and never ceasing to sanctify others (DS 329)" His aim

was also to change fragile shoots into trees so deeply rooted in God that they are able to withstand all the winds out to destroy human dignity.

Besides, God himself is the author of marriage; it is not to be regarded as a purely human institution. It is rather a grace which God bestows on the baptised who are not called to the priesthood or the religious life. Therein lies its greatness which could be called initial.

Marriage is a vocation which God himself has placed in human nature. And so, the mutual love between a man and a woman becomes the image (however imperfect) of the love which God has for mankind and the love of Christ for the Church. There is the real dignity of marriage. God created man through love and called him to love.

Christian Marriage is the special space for the exercise of this love. Fertility is then associated with it so that the spouses continue the work of creation. "Be fertile, multiply, fill the earth and submit it" (Genesis 1,28).

If marriage is a vocation to Love, it is evident that the spouses don't enter into it for themselves alone. The love which is constructed in their household must shine forth towards the exterior, because "the well being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life". (CCC 1603) Marriage is a great grace which God gives the spouses. In this respect their vocation is simply to be a tiny reflection of the love which is to be found in

the week in the simple wooden chapel, and they helped to animate a musical social evening on the final night. Even a moslem family, recently arrived from Bangkok joined in the final celebration.

The brothers all appreciated the simplicity of the experience ... simple accommodation ... simple food ... no electricity ... no radio or TV ... a giant open-air 'church' consisting of an enchanting mountain landscape ... The hospitality of the villagers ... etc. 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?

Austin Hughes, scj.

Pa Bong Piang is our destination for the annual retreat. It is located at the foot of the Inthanon Mountain and surrounded by mountains and trees. This village is in Mae jam, Chiang Mai province. There are 7-8 houses in this village and most of the villagers are Catholics. Pa Bong Piang is really a place of beautiful landscapes, peaceful dwellings and God's presence.

The weather is very superb, good for our daily activities. It is cold in the morning and evening. We really enjoy the atmosphere at this beautiful place.

Food is one of our concerns but everything becomes comfortable to us. Fortunately we can adjust easily.

The retreat takes place from November 27th to December 3rd, 2011. Fr. Jeerapat is our retreat preacher. His leadership is very good and tries to make us feel comfortable with the new method of the annual retreat.

We have daily talks, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Most of the time is spent in personal reflection in the natural surroundings. The main theme is "Being with God's presence in the nature". Moreover, some villagers are invited to be the preachers of special topics, for example, the topic of the lay experience with the former Betharram missionaries.

The time spent in personal reflection and in being with the surrounding nature helped me a lot to ponder on my vocational life. It also enhanced my spiritual dimension to get deeper and closer to God.

Through this method I find myself peaceful and I reflect that our God is ever great for He has created everything in this world.

To be with the nature is to be with God. In the serene atmosphere I really find God's presence within it. The serenity of nature energizes my whole being in order to go forward as a Betharramite religious.

I have come to know the old stories, the missionary work and the lives of the former Betharramite missionaries who had spent their lives with the people in Mae jam. Most of the Karen people still feel them present in their daily lives.

David Phithak Bi-Thu, scj

First of all I would like to thank God for giving me this opportunity to discover and reflect upon myself, especially my spiritual life. Also it was the time to recharge the energy in order to proceed to the next step of life in the seminary. Many thanks to father Jeerapat Raksikhao SCJ, our superior for making this retreat a reality. The moment I reached the village, we were

welcomed by the villagers. It was a warm welcome and they helped us a lot regarding place, food and all the facilities. The retreat was guided by Fr. Jeerapat our superior. He helped us and accompanied us in this one week retreat.

I got a chance to make my own hermitage with the straw, collected from the rice field. This was my first hermitage made by myself. I was making it in silence. I was very proud of myself. The atmospheres was also very helpful to me to experience God's love. I could see the sunrise and sunset. I did not forget to thank God for this unconditional love which has given to me and to my friends.

Each day, Fr. Jeerapat scj gave me the themes to reflect upon and to integrate into my life. Also I made the desert experience in order to stay in my own shelter and to reflect about all the dimensions of my life. It was a privilege for me that some day of the daily reflections were given by three of the elderly villagers who shared with us about the Betharramite missionaries who came and planted the seed of faith and converted them to Christianity. They also shared stories about villages established by Betharramite fathers.

I found out other aspects of my life, the moment I was freed from the distractions which were disturbing me, but the most important things was the personal relationship with God. I can frankly and confidently say: "I love you, Lord" because from the first moment I woke up, I heard the sound of birds and I saw the sun from its rising till its setting.

I got a chance to stroll up to the Peak of Inthanon Mountain. It took three and half hours to reach the peak. This was the time to remember and experience the footprints of the Betharramite Missionaries, difficulties which

they had gone through and to be grateful to them.

I experienced the love of God through the creatures of God and during my retreat time, I discovered the love of God which He has given to me, then I understood my strength and fragility. I also appreciated the values of the nature and my fellow beings as well.

I received and realized the values of my vocation: God has called me to follow Him and to imitate His way of living as a simple human being. During my retreat, there was a time to overcome the disturbances and obstacles within my own self and to have more awareness of my reaction and the responses towards society and community as well. Fr. Austin Hughes scj gave me the five steps of spiritual exercises which were very helpful to me to examine my conscience. They were:

Firstly, thank God for the gift of the day before going to bed. It's a key of happiness.

Secondly, ask God's light about the things I could have done better.

Thirdly, imagine my life like a movie (review of the whole day: what is God doing in my life?)

Fourthly, simply ask for God's healing grace.

Fifthly, simply ask God for the grace to do His will and to do our daily task better tomorrow.

As saint Michael Garicoïts our founder, do it at the end of the day.

I really appreciated the simplicity of the experience because I could find God's love everywhere and be brought back to my roots.

Emilio Sanan Pleepor, scj

Betharramite Parish Priest of Fatima in Bouar.

In the days before the show arrived in town big trucks coming from the "brousse" (savanna) villages full of people and agricultural goods.

The fair began in an atmosphere of celebration and joy, after the speeches by the authorities. The days were accompanied by background music, by dancing and singing.

Given the results, Bouar had never seen so many products together in one go.

Some representatives of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and WFP (World Food Programme) were also present; they are tackling the problem of world food security and they were surprised to see such a large participation and so many fruits brought by farmers, considering that the only tool at their disposal is the hoe!

For two days the attention of Bouar was focused on this initiative.

Fr. Beniamino, on this occasion, could say: "From tomorrow after the comprehensive assessment of the fair, we will go back to work. We have already prepared a program to train and support the associations ... We have no money to implement it. The future of this part of Africa depends on agricultural work. We believe in this and continue our fight against poverty. We have realised how hard work gives fruit".

Vicariate of Brazil

Passa Quatro ► On February 6-10, 2012, the Vicariate of Brazil held the Annual Assembly in Passa Quatro. After a reflection guided by Fr Henrique Matos (religious of the "Misericordia"), who invited everyone to "re-take possession of the Betharramite charism", the 31 members present (including 16 scholastics), took into consideration pastoral life and the future of the Vicariate of Brazil. A lot of hope was put on the vitality of the numerous young people and on the wisdom of the elders, patriarchs and prophets of the Gospel.



Vicariate of India

Mangalore ► On February, 17 & 25 was held the first Regional Council in Maria Kripa, Mangalore. It was the first Regional meeting to include Fr Wilfred as Regional Vicar for England.



Congregation - Rome

At long last! ► On February 25, 2012, eight months after the voting of the Rule of Life by the General Chapter (May 2011), the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has eventually approved the new Rule of Life. The long process that led to the overhaul of the Rule of Life required painstaking work by a specific committee that tried to bring out, on the one hand, the peculiarity and the richness of our charism and, on the other hand, emphasized its ecclesial significance.

We thank the Lord for this important step taken by the our Congregation, and we are grateful to all those who, with commitment and dedication, have given their contribution to achieve this important result.

Vicariate of Italy



Casaglia ► On February 14-15, thirty religious of the Italian Vicariate held a general assembly at Casaglia, a town near Albiate (Milan). Fr Mario Longoni was the facilitator and guided the exchange of

ideas at the presence of Fr Jean-Luc Morin, Regional Superior and Fr Aldo Nespoli, Vicar for Italy. In a peaceful and fraternal atmosphere, a need for a change emerged among the Italian Betharramites, all determined to go along the path mapped out by the last general chapter.

Vicariate of Ivory Coast

Yamoussoukro ► On Sunday, February 26, 2012, the youth of one part of Yamoussoukro made their annual pilgrimage by walking to the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace. Over 150 young people from St Felix joined the pilgrimage, accompanied by Fr Arsene and Bro. Armel, both Betharramite religious. It was a crowd of over 6000 young who reflected on the meaning of "service" in their Christian daily lives.

Vicariate of Central Africa

Bouar ► "Kekereke ti awafango yaka, kekereke ti beafrica": the future of Central Africa depends on the future of farmers.

This was the slogan of the third edition of the agricultural fair held in Bouar, Central African Republic, Saturday 18 and Sunday, 19 of February, organized and supported by NGOs Mercycorps, that works in the territory and by the Caritas Bouar, whose referent, and organizer is Fr. Beniamino Gusmeroli,

... the Community of Hojai

OCTOBER 26, 2011, MARKED AN IMPORTANT STEP IN THE LIFE OF THE INDIAN VICARIATE, AND CONSEQUENTLY IN THE CONGREGATION: ON BEHALF OF ARCHBISHOP OF GUWAHATI, FR. THOMAS MATTATHILANY WELCOMED FR. SUBESH AND FR. WILFRED TO ENTRUST BETHARRAM WITH THE MISSION POST OF CHRIST THE REDEEMER IN HOJAI. THIS IS HOW THE LONG-AWAITED BETHARRAM MISSIONARY COMMUNITY WAS BORN IN INDIA. IN THESE FOUR MONTHS, THE NEWLY-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY HAS BEEN GRADUALLY SETTLING DOWN AND, THOUGH QUITE FAR AWAY FROM BANGALORE AND MANGALORE, IS FACING THE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE GENEROSITY AND THE HOPE OF A SOWER.

NEF: Your community is in Hojai, Assam, in the North-East of India. Tell us something about the geographical and social characteristics of this area of the Indian Sub-Continent.

- Mukithadhat Shrine (Redeemer the Christ) Hojai, is in the archdiocese of Guwahati. This North East region of India is totally different from the rest of India. It is a hilly area which is part of the Himalayan chain Mountains. The indigenous people of this region belong to numerous tribes. These tribes mainly were monotheist and animist; they are not exposed to the world outside. First time in history, the light of Christ was brought into this wonderful land during the period of colonization, by the German Salvatorian missionaries. During the [second] world war they were forced to evacuate from this region and the people were left without pastors. Later the Salesians were called in to assure the pastoral care of these tribes. The Salesians did a wonderful job and the North-East has now grown into different dioceses with good number of local priests and religious. A remarkable thing is to note is that there is a lot more potentials for the future mission.

For a few years our young religious in formation have been experiencing the missionary life in the North-East. Who welcomed them and in what kind of ministry have they been involved?

- The betharramite presence in the north east began with some brothers who were sent here for regency. We were warmly welcomed by MSFS Fathers. They opened their mission stations for our brothers to have their regency experience. We will be forever grateful to MSFS Fathers for their good will. The first group of regent brothers were sent in 2004. The regents were encouraged to help in the mission schools and hostels in the local mission. Till 2010 we had our regent brothers for one year service. From last year onwards our brothers in theology are coming for mission experience in summer holidays. In perspective, this will help them to come in contact with the culture of the region and to pick up the local languages which will help in turn to form new missionaries for this region. Also we have brothers in noviciate who are coming for their community experience to this region.

This year we have 3 of our Indian novices, by name Vino, Edwin, Justin in Hojai community.

Tell us something about the new community: when it was established, its members, the difficulties you are facing ...

- It was the long lasting dream of many betharramites to have a community in the North East of India. For the last few years there were fathers who were working in different dioceses. The unforeseen special invitation of Guwahati archbishop made this dream come true. In October 26, 2012 with the leadership of Fr Subesh together with Fr Wilfred and 3 of the novices, we opened our new betharram community at Hojai, in Guwahati archdiocese. Just like for any other community, the beginnings were not easy: a lot of opposition came, inevitably, from the domestic staffs of the campus and staffs at schools. Amidst all these troubles we could find consolation in the mutual support of our community members, with all your blessing and prayers we could win the confidence of the people.

The community project is without any doubt an important element of the community life. Was it difficult to draw it up? Did you receive any help? What are the main aspects of this project, regarding prayer, community life and mission?

- As this community is far away from the

main communities in the vicariate, it had its own difficulties in the beginning. The special interest of Fr Biju Alappat, vicar of India, gave confidence to face the difficulties. Also we felt the care and warmth of Fr Austin, who, in this past 4 months, paid two visits to our community. The demand of the mission is too big. The importance of our community life revolves around all our mission activities. We make sure that at least twice in a day we come together for community prayers, also we make a point to be together at the table for meals.

Once in a month we come together with 2 women religious communities for a day of recollection. The fathers from nearby mission communities come and give us an hour of reflection followed by an hour of adoration and sacrament of reconciliation.

The mission of our community consists of 3 dimensions.

1) Education mission, we have a comparatively large school with 1400 students and 46 teaching and non teaching staff members headed by Fr. Subesh as principal.

2) Pastoral mission: In the parish we have 3 ethnic groups namely Karbies, Garos, and Santalis. Every Sunday we make a point to go to a village to offer mass in one of the believers' house after the parish mass, since the villagers are away from the parish. Also we make a point to visit villages during the week for catechism and preparation for the Sunday liturgy. We are also in look out for the friends who welcome us to share

our faith and way of life with them.

3) Ministry to children at hostel. We have in our hostel 42 boys and 36 girls in the girls hostel. We are looking forward to bring them in good faith and promising and committed citizens of tomorrow. We have special care for these children, they are from remote villages. Giving them the power of knowledge, means to help them look beyond the village.

You are quite far away from Bangalore and Mangalore: can you keep in touch with the other communities in India? And with the other communities of the Region, mainly Thailand?

- Yes father your observations are very true. We are quiet far away from the communities of our vicariate. We also felt sometimes the gap of the communications. But the warmth of our brethren in south India helps us forget the distance.

What is your cooperation with the diocesan priests and the missionaries of other Congregations? Can they see in you a "community in mission"?

- It is something notable that in this mission land the difference between the diocesan and the religious especially among different religious communities is narrowed down to a situation where we all feel that we are part of one family. It came as a surprise for the many of the old missionaries of this region to see our young community with this many religious together. They always

appreciated a big community together for a mission cause.



In your ministry you are in touch with the youth. In the community project what is the place of vocation promotion?

- I don't know what to answer to this question. To tell you the truth, out of these 1400 students in our school, 65% are Muslims and remaining 33 % are Hindus or tribes and only 20 students are Catholics. Our focus is to sow the seed of faith and this 21st century will see its slow growth. The fruits, if there are any, can be expected in 22nd century. We may see it being in the presence of our heavenly father.

In the history of our Congregation is there a period or a particular event which reflects your situation and could be an inspiration in your ministry?

- We the betharramites are meant to be sent to a place where others are unwilling to go. So we feel that being far away from the main streams of the community we are in the footsteps of our father St. Michael. It is also the dream of our congregation to go back to China and re-establish our presence in China. Working at the China border and among the Mongolian race we hope that this dream too will come true one day.