

prevents the witness of a genuine religious life.

- Let St Michael's spirit be embodied in new countries, produce excellent fruits, and be favourable in the development and national organisation...

- Allow a more active animation focused on vocations which should result in an increasing number of new candidates for the Institute.

- Above all allow the rising generations to be better formed respecting their culture, their language and local customs. "Give us real Betharramites: in England in the English style; in France in the French style; in Italy in the Italian style" (Suberbielle); "Trust us, we'll find you candidates" (Lyth) "Betharram is the name of a family for which we must find a depth of life and a development worthy of the great desire of Blessed Michael" (Del Grande).

- Allow a better financial availability and consequently a better sharing of the income from apostolic activities.

- Respond to the expectations and desires of the grass roots.

The few voices against feared the breakup of the Congregation, the risk of too much autonomy which

would encourage "the loosening of the spirit of unity"; they even went so far as to fear the danger of a schism in the Congregation; consequently there were endless discussions with the Chapter Fathers, discussions concerning financial problems which could have repercussions on the whole of the Congregation.

However the Congregation was ready to take this giant step forward and there was no going back on the decision. The minutes of the voting in the decisive session give these results: "In the secret ballot on the experiment of Provinces, out of 23 voters: 22 voted YES and one blank vote. In his summing up the Very Reverend Superior General described the unanimity as **"a historic vote in the life of the Institute"** (bold type in the text) You can almost hear the voice of the Sacred Heart repeating the *Duc in altum* [launch out into the deep] spoken to St Peter long ago.

by Roberto Cornara

To be continued ►

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Societas S<sup>mi</sup> Cordis Jesu  
BETHARRAM

73  
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NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE  
NOTICIAS EN FAMILIA  
NOTIZIE IN FAMIGLIA  
FAMILY NEWS

News bulletin of the Congregation  
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A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

## Betharramite Obedience

*Filial obedience for love's sake constitutes the soul of our Congregation: "What should be characteristic of us is our spirit of obedience; if obedience is lacking then our raison d'être is lacking. (R of L. 60; DS 196 – 197).*

This quotation and the very title of the chapter in the Rule of Life show that obedience is part and parcel of our identity as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Contemplation and imitation of the obedient Heart of Christ, *aflame with the desire to fulfil his Father's will* (art 60) make the originality of the experience of faith not only of St Michael Garicoits but also of all the Betharramites, of today and of all times. They remind us of Jesus obedient, enlivened by the Spirit of his Father at the moment of his conception, and saying: Here I am, my God, I have come to do your will. (Heb 10, 7). To Jesus who says that his will is to look after his Father's affairs, when his mother asks him: My child, why have you done this to us? (Luke 2, 48-49) To Jesus obedient who, at Gethsemane said: Father, let your will be done, and not mine (Luke 22, 42). To Jesus obedient to the will of his Father at every moment of his life: Such was the reason for every one of the actions of our Lord Jesus Christ; "My food, he said, is to do the will of him who sent me, and I have only been busy doing as he pleases"

CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS OF BETHARRAM

7 - The 1947 Chapter and contributions

(DS 92 – 93). Obedience is only possible as part of a permanent project of life to renounce one's own interests and projects so as to accept the interests and projects of the Father for the good of the whole of mankind. Obedience is the opposite of "the ego which has become the end of everything" (R of L 59; DS 83). Our vocation consists of being freely and responsibly at the service of the mission and knowing how to give up what is our pleasure so as to be pleasing to the Father (Jn 8, 29; R of L 63). This is how it was with Jesus obedient to his Father, with the obedience of St Michael Garicoits in his dealings with his Bishop, with the obedience of all the Betharramites of all times in their dealings with their lawful superiors. The secret of the obedience of Jesus is very well put by Benedict XVI when he says: "His death on the cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him – this is love in its most radical form" (Deus Caritas Est 12). The authentic Betharramite doesn't live for himself, but for God to collaborate in his project for the salvation of the whole of mankind. Through our religious profession we offer our wills as a total sacrifice of ourselves to God, our Father (Art 60). This is love in its most radical form. Love and obedience go hand in hand. St Michael Garicoits talks about the double law: the interior law, the law of love, and the exterior law, the law of obedience. It is the Holy Spirit, Master of the Interior Life, who is wont to engrave the interior law of love on the hearts. The law of obedience

responds to external means: the Rule of Life, the community and orders of superiors. God, from whom all good things come, requires instruments stripped of everything, particularly stripped of self and totally abandoned in their heart to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the law of love and charity and to the great law of obedience following the example of Our Lord Himself. (Letters Vol. I. letter 293, pages 128 – 130). It is only from our own experience of faith in Jesus Christ that we can explain why we renounce the right to independence by cultivating our own projects and our decision freely accepted to make God's will ours. United to Christ in the offering of ourselves through love, we become free by renouncing our most lawful desires through fidelity to the community's mission. This is how we become really the disciples of Jesus, "advancing with hearts overflowing with a holy joy, in the service of God" (Art 64; DS 156). From this point of view, a Betharramite is a man of discernment seeking the will of God with his community and superiors. With the help of his brothers, he applies himself with all his power in accomplishing the will of God expressed for him by the community and apostolic project. A Betharramite submits with faith to the decisions of his lawful superiors, decisions which are reached according to the governing authorities as expressed in the Rule of Life. The distinctive feature of the Betharramites is to obey the Pope and the Bishops in whose dioceses there are communities, for the good of the individual, for the celebration of the sacraments and

The 1947 Chapter was decisive for the next 60 years. It was there that the subdivision of the Congregation into Provinces was decided. It must be pointed out that the Fathers in Chapter were not asked how the subdivision of the Congregation would be done nor what grouping of nations would be contemplated, quite simply to adopt an automatic decision: namely should this new form of intermediate government be introduced or not. It fell to the new General Council to put this decision of the Chapter into operation as will be seen later on. Judging from contributions during the Chapter it would seem that except for a few isolated voices, the Fathers in Chapter were in agreement for the introduction of the subdivision of the Congregation into Provinces. The reasons for this were mostly as follows:

- Put an end to the "colonial regime" (Labouerie) which had been the Congregation's way of functioning for too long. It was a situation which presented Europe as a well spring of vocations in support of works in America and America as "the colony



*Religious in Brazil - 1954*

which existed to supply revenues."

- Put an end to the "export system" which had developed especially after World War I whereby novices and scholastics – American, Italian, English and Spanish were assembled so as to study together and were "obliged to share the same mentality and language and adopt customs which were totally unknown to them".
- Put an end to an ever creeping nationalism, to a "religious racism" (Labouerie) and to "the disquiet resulting from the friction between nationalities" (Garcia); on the one hand these tend to upset the balance of community life, embitter minds and hearts, and on the other hand

AUGUST	15	Joyeux anniversaire 70 ans de profession	P. Bernard Béhocaray P. Paul Baradat P. Joseph Mazerolles P. Jean Casenave
		65 ans de profession	P. Pierre Salla
	17	Feliz cumpleaños	P. Gustavo Agin
	18	Buon compleanno	P. Ernesto Consonni
	21	Joyeux anniversaire Joyeux anniversaire	P. Joseph Domecq Fr. Martial Mengué
	25	Joyeux anniversaire	Mgr Vincent Landel
	26	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Jean Tapie
	27	40 años de sacerdocio	P. Milciades Ortigoza
	28	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Alexandre Berhouet
	29	Happy birthday	Fr. Gabriel Phonchai Sukjai
31	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Dominique Etchéverria	
SEPTEMBER	2	Bom aniversário	P. Paulo Cesar Pinto
	3	Happy birthday	Fr. Suthon Khiriwathanasakun
	4	Happy birthday Joyeux anniversaire	Fr. Austin Hughes P. Luc-Martial Kouadio
	13	Bom aniversário Joyeux anniversaire	P. Paulo Vital Campos P. Philippe Hourcade
	14	30 ans de profession 30 anni di professione	P. Elie Kurzum P. Antonio Riva
	15	10 ans de profession	P. Gerard Zugarramurdi

the animation of the pastoral. Without this obedience of religious to their superiors the congregation cannot take a steady commitment to the local Churches because the Congregation does not know if it will be able to honour these commitments,

We have been called by the Spirit to reproduce the humility and obedience of Christ. And we have been invited to help each other mutually in being faithful to our charism in community. The community is where we have the privilege of discerning and accepting God's will, and of progressing together in the union of spirit and hearts (VC 92; R of L 66). Whenever a religious is called to take a decision which can be asked by obedience, his brothers in community should help him, bearing in mind the communion which joins us to Jesus obedient and to the obedience requested by the Major Superiors as something good both for the religious himself and for the missionary commitment undertaken by the Congregation.

A change of community and mission should be thought of as something good for the religious himself. If such a change requires a sacrifice from him, it is also a source of new opportunities, a source of personal enrichment and blossoming. At the heart of the community, the superior is the servant of God for the common good (Rom 13,4; RofL67). The service of superior of the community ought to advance the unity of the community around the fidelity of each one to the charism of St Michael Garicoits. To accomplish this the superior must know, appreciate and



*"Ecce Ancilla Domini..."*  
Fresco by Fra Angelico  
Convent of San Marco, Florence

stimulate the qualities of each religious; he must encourage creativity and missionary daring, while at the same time warning against excessive activity which could endanger health, personal balance, spiritual life, the community and even missionary activity.

Like chastity and poverty, obedience confers on the life of Jesus and on that of consecrated souls an eschatological dimension: once our hearts have been freed from the longing for pleasures (art 43), from the attraction for materiel goods and affections, and by sacrificing our freedom today in order to accomplish the will of the Father, we wish to proclaim the day *"when everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subject in his turn to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all!"* (1 Cor. 15, 28; R of L 69).

Gaspar Fernández Pérez, scj

## Living Hope With Mary

ON SATURDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> MAY IT WAS THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE “NE ME” FRATERNITY OF THE BETHARRAMITE LAITY IN ADIAPODOUME (IVORY COAST). TO BEGIN WITH THE FRATERNITY FOCUSED ITS REFLECTION ON THIS THEME: “MARY, MODEL OF HOPE”. Here is an extract of the reflection offered by Felicien Valentin and Leontine.

By being aware that for the People of God, the foundation of Hope is the covenant, the promises of God and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians share the virtue of hope with Mary who continues to exert a good influence on the life of the Church. This hope concerns essentially material and spiritual gifts, both invisible and yet to come, for what can be seen can no longer be hoped for.



The young looking for genuine love ought to look to the Virgin and call upon her maternal help to preserve them in purity,

Mary also reminds married couples of the fundamental values of marriage; she helps the partners to overcome all the temptations of discouragement, and the passions which try to submit their hearts. Her total commitment to God is for them a strong encouragement to be faithful to their commitment to each other.

Sure enough as Mother of all mankind, Mary knows the needs and desires of the whole of humanity. This is why we should join her school taking her as our model and trying to live like her in total trust of her intercession.

Through her life Mary encourages all Christians to lead a life of chastity according to their state of life and to entrust themselves to the Lord in the different circumstances of their lives.

14	Bom aniversário	P. Joachim Soares Moreira
16	Feliz cumpleaños	P. Enrique Lasuén
17	70 años de profesión	P. Enrique Lasuén
18	Buon compleanno Happy birthday	P. Giovanni Duca Fr. Mongkhon Charoentham
20	Buon compleanno Happy birthday	P. Carlo Antonini P. Beniamino Gusmeroli Br. Patrick Leighton
21	Happy birthday	Br. George Anthonyswamy
23	Bom aniversário	P. Sebastião do Nascimento Pereira P. Mauro Ulrich de Oliveira
26	Happy birthday	Br. John Britto Irudhayam
28	Feliz cumpleaños Joyeux anniversaire 10 ans de profession	Mons. Ignacio Gogorza P. Jean-Dominique Delgue P. Narcisse Zaolo
29	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Gaston Gabaix-Hialé
31	Buon compleanno	P. Carlo Sosio
1	Buon compleanno Bom aniversário	P. Enrico Mariani P. Jair Pereira da Silva
2	Happy birthday	P. Graziano Sala
3	10 ans de sacerdoce	P. Luc Martial Kouadio
4	Feliz cumpleaños Buon compleanno	P. Julián Miguel P. Eyad Bader
8	Bon anniversaire	F. Armel Vabié Daly
10	Bom aniversário	P. Vicente de Menezes
12	Buon compleanno	P. Maurizio Vismara P. Damiano Colleoni
13	60 years of profession	Br. Michael Richards
14	Bom aniversário	P. Antonio Scarpa

JULY

AUGUST

# OF THE CONGREGATION

brothers were also received as aspirants. After the Eucharist, Fr. Biju Alappat, the Regional Vicar, laid the Foundation Stone for the New Formation House at Maria Kripa in the presence of fathers, sisters and friends.

In the afternoon, two of our brothers, Br Livin and Br George Mathew were ordained as Deacons at St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore.

## Vicariate of Thailand

**Missionaries in the making** ► On May 16-22 seven Philosophy brothers had a mission experience at Mea Teang District under the guidance of Fr Tidkham scj and Fr Prasit, diocesan priest.

On May 22-28, three Betharramite Scholastics had a mission experience called "Follow in the footsteps of the missionary" at Sao Hin District, guided by a priest of Chiang Mai diocese. They travelled on foot from village to village and spent

their time with people. They were really impressed by the warm welcome they received. This fruitful experience enriched our young brother who could share the faith and the life of the people.

## IN MEMORIAM

Let us pray for **Mr. Jean Noël Etcheverria**, brother of Fr Dominique Etcheverria scj, who died on May 18 at the age of 71 years in Estérençuby (France, Basque Country).

Let us also pray for **Mrs Léonie Garat**, mother of Br. Emile Garat scj, who passed away on July 5 in Armendarits (France, Basque Country).

On July 9th the **father of Fr Viravit scj** died, in Thailand. We join the religious of the Vicariate to pray for him and for his family.

Mary shows Christians how Faith is a way of commitment and participation requiring boldness, courage and constant perseverance as they learn to find in God's will a similar happiness to the one she enjoyed (D S Michael Garicoits page 436) as she gave herself totally to God so as to look towards the other.

Mary's presence in the Church reassures Christians to listen on a daily basis to the Word of the Lord so as to have a better understanding of the different types of daily hope in the loving plans of the love of God for them.

Today, Mary is inviting the whole of humanity (more and more she is held in high honour by believers who are not necessarily Catholics) to live in the hope of a world at peace, of a world of peace. For her who hoped against all hope, it is a sign of her universal spiritual maternity; this is a great sign of hope for the ecumenical journey which is a token of peace and unity.

Finally, glorified body and soul in Heaven, Mary contributes to the strengthening of our hope. The Mother of Jesus represents and inaugurates the Church in its completion while awaiting the coming of the Lord. Already she shines as the sign of certain hope and consolation for the people of God. It's a real hope for humanity who can see in Mary's Assumption how the perfection of our Christian life will be realised for each one of us.

Having reached the fullness of her happiness because she believed in the fulfilment of the Words of the Lord,

Mary accompanies the believers and the whole Church, so that through the joys and trials of this present life, they may become genuine prophets of hope in our world.

The hope placed in Mary demands trust on our part. This is why wanting to increase this trust in us, Jesus gave us his own Mother (John 19, 27) to be our advocate, and has given her all the power to obtain for us the grace of our salvation and the hope of acquiring everything for the glory of God.

It is therefore only right that we should proclaim Mary as our Hope, since we hope to obtain through her intercession what we would never obtain by our own prayers. We pray to her so that the dignity of such a patron will make up for our weakness.

Praying Mary with such hope doesn't mean to say that we don't trust divine mercy, but that we humble ourselves before our unworthiness.

Therefore the Church is right in calling Mary, the Mother of Holy Hope, meaning that it is she who instils in us, not a vain empty hope of the worthless goods of this life, but the Holy Hope of the great and eternal goods of the life to come.

Félicien Valentin & Léontine



*Saint Michael Garicoits wrote...*

## Duties of Superiors who are not aware of certain rules

If the religious have not been formed thanks to the care, the attention, the good example of Superiors they will never practise virtue, and will only produce brambles and thorns. If Superiors have no more walls strong enough to withstand the torrent of misdeeds they will react. Superiors ought therefore to have rules and regulations which they must read frequently. The Superior of the Society will, either on his own initiative or through his visitators, impart such knowledge as he deems necessary. In the presence of the local Superior and of the council, they will do a reading of the rules and regulations. They will point out where they are not being observed and the means by which they can be restored.

(M 336)

## A purification journey for strengthening our unity

THE 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ST MICHAEL (MAY 14<sup>TH</sup> 2013 - MAY 14<sup>TH</sup> 2014) IS COMING UP.

FR. ENRICO FRIGERIO, HEAD OF THE COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF THE PREPARATION OF THE EVENT, PROPOSES THIS REFLECTION...

At this time leading up to the official launching of the Jubilee Year dedicated to St Michael, it seemed to me a very good idea to reread certain directions given to the universal Church which at the time was getting ready for the Jubilee of 2000; these directions were given by Blessed John Paul II in his 1994 apostolic letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente. All we have to do is to put these indications in the context of our religious family.

There is a point which deals with our admitting that we are sinners. The Pope was reminding the Church that "she cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act. Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them" (TMA 33). At every level our Congregation is invited to adopt a similar penitential attitude in the different initiatives which will be a mark of this time of preparation for the Jubilee

### S. Michael Garicoïts



From the heart of Christ  
to the heart of the world

year. In his introduction to the report on the General Chapter, the Superior General encouraged us when he said that "it is not because we are aware of our sinfulness that we should remain idle"; on the contrary "we must make an examination of conscience, in all sincerity, of the different aspects of our lives". He added to his message by citing the example of St Michael who, in a letter invited a religious to take a

## Vicariate of France-Spain

### A day retreat for religious and lay people

► Saturday, June 16th the community "Notre Dame" of Betharram invited the laity and the religious for a day of recollection. The recollection started with a reflection on "The love of Christ in Saint Paul", given by Fr. Grech, the superior of the community. Then the participants – among them religious from the "Maison Neuve", Betharram, from Pau and from Anglet - went to the Chapel of Saint Michael for a celebration presided over by Fr Beñat Oyhénart.

## Vicariate of Ivory Coast

**Over a quarter of a century in the Ivory Coast** ► On June 19 Fr. Jean-Marie Ruspil left the Vicariate after spending 28 years of mission, most of which in Dabakala and the last five in Yamoussoukro, in the parish of Saint Felix in Sinzibo. He will join the community of Pibrac in France.

During a fraternal meal in Fr Jean-Marie's honor, Fr Bacho, on behalf of the Vicariate, expressed his gratitude and traced the history of the mission carried out by



Fr Jean-Marie from 1984 up to now. The lay associates too thanked Fr. Jean-Marie and wished him all the best for his new mission.

**In direct contact with the Ivo-**

**rian realities** ► On June 20, the Vicariate held an Assembly with the Superior General, at the end of the canonical visitation, began on June 4. On the agenda of the Assembly: the narratio fidei, group work on the different activities of the Vicariate, the preparation of the hundredth anniversary of the crowning of the Virgin of Betharram and the 150th anniversary of the death of St. Michael. A Eucharistic celebration ended the meeting.

The canonical visitation of Fr. Gaspar started with the community of Dabakala (in the north of Côte d'Ivoire); it continued with the community of Yamoussoukro and came to an end on Tuesday, June 26 in the community of Adiapodoumé.

During his visit, the Superior General shared the life of every community and met the faithful, lay associates, Betharramite youth, children of St. Michael through meetings and Sunday Masses.

## Vicariate of India

**For the Sacred Heart... new hearts!** ► On June, 14 the Maria Kripa community celebrated the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

During the Eucharistic celebration Bros. Jesuraj, Yesudas, George Antony and Rojo received the Ministry of Acolyte, while Bros. Sathish and Jude were instituted Lectors. During the same celebration, some



decided on a monthly spiritual meeting for Advent and Lent; besides the Vicar comes to Bouar every week. This is obviously not enough. So at a recent visit from the Regional Superior we are now looking at a new organisation of the Vicariate. Structures can't do much if we are not determined to live together and to serve together, each according to his possibilities in the Congregation and in the local Church.

*What I find astonishing is the importance attached to the commitment at the social level; at a time of great tensions and "chronic" poverty, the Betharramite religious live out their commitment to evangelisation and human promotion in community – village schools, dispensary, Prevention Centre – These are huge emergencies in the social milieu in which you are living, why? And what are the causes?*

As has already been stated, for some time now the Church in Central Africa has pointed out two priorities: education and health and we have made them ours so as to render the best service to this population.

I must also add that apart from the capital Bangui the Central African state is totally absent. Consequently, the different churches and especially the Catholic Church together with a few NGOs have decided to provide a minimum of dignity and development to the local population. Besides the commitment for education and health, it is the same for evangelisation.

*The General Chapter reminded us that vocations are the responsibility of all the religious. We are not to be afraid of the young; they are in constant conversion because our witness is ever more coherent and because we have an eye to the future. Is the community a "challenge" for the young? And if so, how?*

Accepting the young is always a challenge and even more so in the present context. Discerning vocations isn't simple either; we must bear in mind the low level of education of the young who knock at our doors.

Here is what we do to welcome aspirants: St Michael's House admits the young for a period of two years before sending them to Ivory Coast. We encourage self confidence in the young by giving them the opportunity to follow several formation courses – human, religious and biblical. Naturally we point out the importance of availability for the different community services not forgetting manual tasks. There is something which impresses the young who live with us, namely our constant commitment to evangelisation and the service of mankind without distinction of race or religious beliefs. Right now we are preparing a project for the young who will be coming to live with us from next September. We are always ready to accept the young who are already in formation and who are part of our religious family.

look at the evil in her life and to say to the Lord: "Here are the fruits of my garden; I can only show more of the same from my funds; but only say a word and everything will change". Celebrating a Jubilee Year means to listen carefully to catch the "word" and to let our lives change.

Another important point from the Apostolic Letter is the deep desire for unity among Christians. It also talks about wounds and divisions which need to be cared for and stresses the importance of dialogue and especially prayer for unity. "Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People. We are all however aware that the attainment of this goal cannot be the fruit of human efforts alone, vital though they are. Unity, after all, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We are asked to respond to this gift responsibly, without compromise in our witness to the truth, generously implementing the guidelines laid down by the Council and in subsequent documents of the Holy See". (TMA 34) We can accept this invitation to work for unity as we remember with what ardent zeal St Michael faced the same question himself. "Our Lord asks that God's design for us be accomplished in these words of fire: that they may be one as we are, that they may be one in us. (John 17, 11 – 21). Like us, that is, as imperfect images can never resemble such a model, in us source and origin

of unity by which and in which we are united. May they be one in us! That we may be, not only the model of unity, but the bond of their unity. That they may be one through us and by grace, what we are by the same life." (MS 723). These are strong words which we are invited to consider and make them our own in this time of grace. They are words which could help us to renew our commitment in the course of the different initiatives which will be organised for the 150th anniversary. From the competition for the choice of the logo to prayer meetings, from an exhibition of photos to a pilgrimage, everything will be helping us to raise our eyes to St Michael, to renew in ourselves the charism which he left us and which today more than ever before is present in the Church for the good of the world.

We too, like Blessed John Paul II, let us entrust the commitment of our Congregation through the intercession of Mary, that she will direct our Congregation to renew its "Ecce Venio" with the Incarnate Word of God.

Enrico Frigerio, sci

### ... the Bouar - Niem Community

AT CHRISTMAS 1986 TWO BETHARRAMITE RELIGIOUS, FR. ARIALDO URBANI AND FR. ANTONIO CANAVESI, WERE WELCOMED IN THE DIOCESE OF BOUAR-NIEM. THIS IS HOW THE ADVENTURE OF BETHARRAM STARTED IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC. TODAY, 25 YEARS AHEAD, THE 9 RELIGIOUS OF THIS VICARIATE ARE SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCE, THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND ARE LOOKING INTO THEIR FUTURE.

*Nef: The Community has just celebrated the 25th anniversary of Betharramite presence in Central Africa. How did this presence happen here in the heart of Africa?*

Our presence here for the past 25 years in the C.A.R. is the result of a decision taken by the Chapter of the Italian Province in the 1980s when there was an awareness of the need to be more open to the new forms of poverty (see the opening of the Family House at Monte Porzio). And so it was that Fr Arialdo Urbani as pioneer, and Fr Antonio Canavesi arrived in Niem for Christmas 1986.

Why the C.A.R.? And why Niem? Principally because we knew the Bishop of the new diocese, Mgr Armando Gianni. We want it to be known that the new mission was immediately supported and continues to be supported by a great number of religious from the ex-Province.

*What was the aspect of the new mission at the beginning?*

First of all before our arrival the huge mission territory of Niem was visited



*The Bouar-Niem Community*

from time to time by the Capuchin Fathers but there was no fixed appointment. The first activity of evangelisation was the formation of catechists capable of supporting the new bush community. The first activity was one of evangelisation. It was immediately understood that a positive response had to be given to the demands of the Church in Central Africa which was stating that education and health care were the absolute priorities to encourage a minimum of human development.

This is what explains the opening of village schools (today there are nearly 30 such schools with 4000 pupils learning to read and write thanks to the support of distance adoption). Next came the dispensary at Niem which today has more than 60 beds. To this was added in 2010, the St Michael Centre for the care of AIDS patients.

*After several years in Niem the community broadened its horizon by being responsible for the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima at Bouar; then recently there was the need for a Betharramite Centre focused on formation and vocations, and responding to the many social needs resulting in the opening of the St Michael Home in Bouar with an annex for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (Aids). What drove you to undertake this new mission?*

We have been in charge of the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima since September 1996 at the request of Mgr Gianni. Naturally this presence in the city meant that we were confronted with a totally different environment from what we knew in the bush; it helped us to be able to open up to the young who were beginning to knock at our door. With the passage of time came the need to have a community residence; the St Michael residence was opened in 2010 which allows us to have an area better adapted to welcoming the young, thanks to the new building which was opened this year. In the St Michael Residence which opened in 2010, the Health Care Unit for

AIDS patients was asked for by Mgr Gianni and we gladly accepted to take charge of it. In the past two years this building has become a national reference, thanks especially to its well equipped laboratory and the collaboration between the Association Il Mosaico in Monte Porzio and two leading hospitals in Italy: the Spallanzani Establishment and the National Institute for Infectious Diseases in Rome and the San Raffael Hospital in Milan. Finally I would like to point out that the running of the Centre is entrusted entirely to Divine Providence, in view of the fact that the care of the patients is entirely free, and that Providence has opened many doors for us, especially the collaboration with the World Bank for AIDS patients.

*You are keeping up three residences but only one community: furthermore it is good to remember that the distance from Niem and Bouar is about 70km. How do you manage to make a community? Where do you find the time? How do you manage to organise community meetings and time for your spiritual life?*

That's a difficult question! It is not easy to live in a community with three residences and a superior who lives 70 km away from the two most important of these residences. So far we are committed to being faithful to our monthly meetings and not one religious has ever missed the rendez-vous. We had

