



DEUS CARITAS EST magazine

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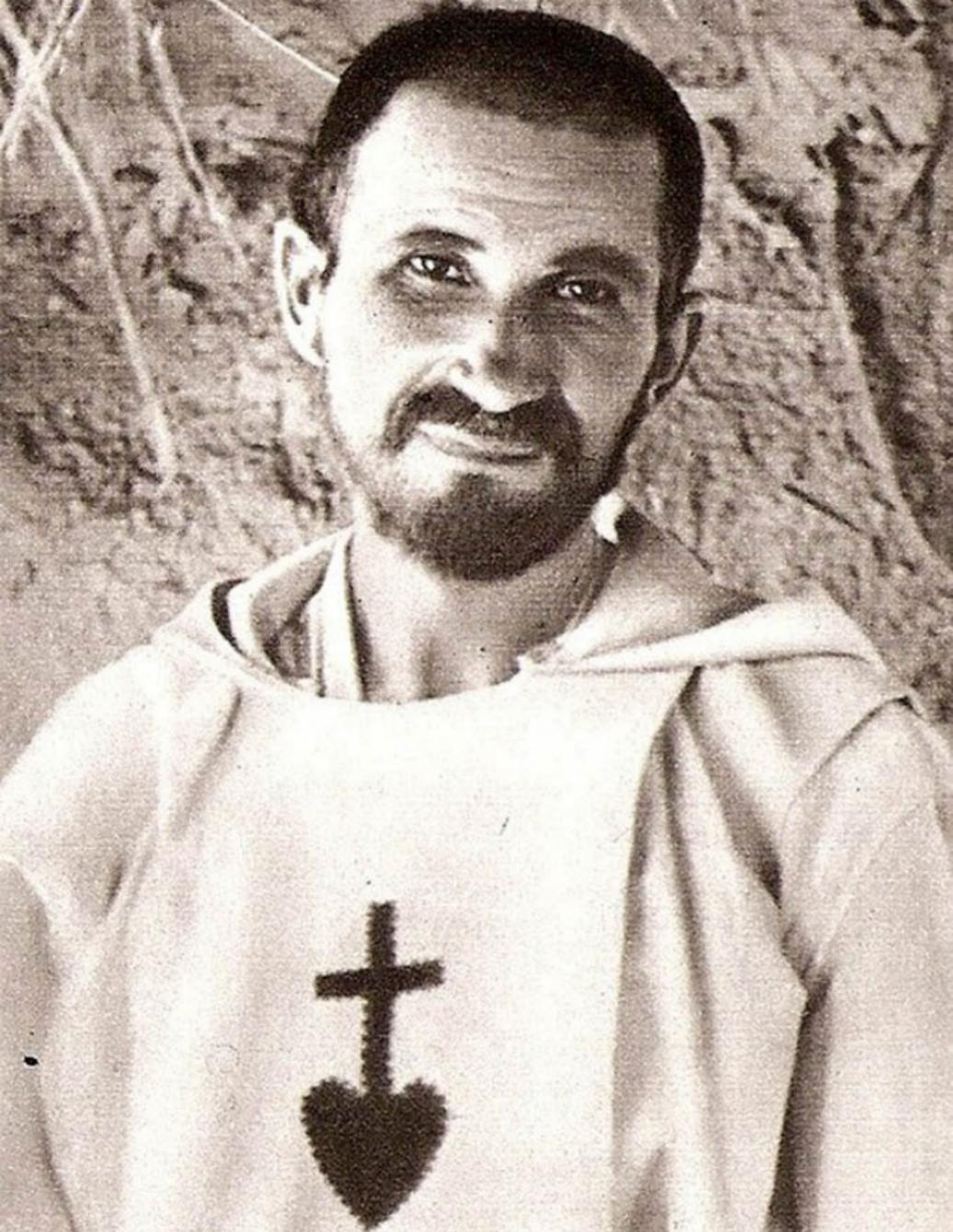
In memoriam >>

What does Charles de Foucauld teach us?

On 15 May, Charles de Foucauld and nine others were canonized by Pope Francis in Saint Peter's Square in Rome amid great interest. He was certainly the best known of the group, as was clear from the cheers that rose from the crowd when the Pope read the act of canonization and said Charles de Foucauld's name.

A canonization is always a moment that allows me to take a closer look at the life of this person and ask what they mean to us today. This is the question I would like to raise today, explicitly directed towards the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity.

His childhood can certainly not be described as exemplary. He finished with the last in the military academy and was later dismissed from the army for misconduct. But deep inside him lived a longing for something big, something absolute. He put this into practice by travelling to Morocco, where he compiled a first-rate geographical study. He was honoured for it by the *Société de Géographie* in Paris. From a life of debauchery, he had taken the first step towards a life with a purpose. But that was not enough for him. From his longing for the absolute, he was looking for something more. Later, he wrote the following about that period: 'I did evil, but neither approved



nor loved it. ... You made me feel a sorrowful void, a depression that I experienced then only; ... it used to come upon me every evening, when I was alone in my rooms; ... it kept me dumb and oppressed during so-called fetes: I organized them, but when the time came I spent them in dumbness, distaste, and infinite boredom.' It is as if we are reading a page from Augustine's *Confessions*.

Everything changed when he met Abbé Huvelin in 1886, who made him kneel down, confess,

and then administered Holy Communion. It was the beginning of his true vocation. 'As soon as I believed there was a God, I realized that I could do nothing else but live solely for him.' It is this last thing that he tried to live up to in the most radical way. From that moment on, he searched tirelessly for the best way to follow Jesus and really live as Jesus of Nazareth.

He spent seven years as a Trappist brother, first in France and later in Syria, where the poverty-stricken lifestyle he so longed for was certainly not a problem. Still, he longed for more. He went to Nazareth, where he lived as a handyman and gardener in a small shed in the garden of the convent of the Poor Clares and spent much time in silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. For him, it became a conscious renunciation of any social prestige to really live as and among the poorest. He dreamed of sharing this ideal with others and twice wrote a rule for the fraternity he called The Little Brothers of Jesus. But he would never have any followers during his lifetime. Eventually, he began a life in the desert, again in Morocco, among the Tuaregs in Tamanrasset. He had been ordained a priest in the meantime, but expressly asked to be allowed to practise his priesthood in this most isolated place where no Christians lived. To really become one with the people with whom he shared his life, he learned their language, and based on his academic interests, he wrote the first dictionaries and grammar. On 1 December 1916, he was killed by an enemy tribe and after a few years he seemed to have been completely forgotten. Yet communities

of brothers and sisters gradually started to grow who tried to live up to his ideal, and today there are several groups worldwide who consider the now Saint Charles de Foucauld as their founder. They seem to be like the fruits of the seed that fell into the earth on that 1 December 1916. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit' (Jn 12:24).

In a text dating back to 1905, Charles very succinctly describes how he sees the life of a Little Brother. 'In everything and for everything, in its simplicity and flexibility, use the life of Nazareth as an example: no habit – like Jesus at Nazareth; no cloister – like Jesus at Nazareth; not an isolated habitation, but near a village – like Jesus at Nazareth; not less than 8 hours of work every day – like Jesus at Nazareth; no great landholdings, nor great houses, nor great expenditures, not even great alms-giving, but extreme poverty in



Hermitage of Charles de Foucauld in the Sahara Desert, Algeria

everything – like Jesus at Nazareth... Pray as Jesus did, pray as much as Jesus prayed, always making a great place in your prayer for Him... Like Him, also making a great place for manual work, for this is not a time taken from prayer, but a time given to prayer; the time of your manual work is a time of prayer... Your life of Nazareth can be lived anywhere: lead it where it will be most useful to your neighbour.’

This formed the basis for Charles for a fresh, totally new interpretation of consecrated life. Living in deep union with Jesus with great attention to the adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Living in unity with each other, in small ‘fraternities’ where one leads a very simple fraternal life. Living in strong solidarity with the people by sharing with them the daily work. These are the ancient fundamental values of consecrated life that were given a radical and at the same time very simplified interpretation. We are invited to ask ourselves how things stand with these three pillars of consecrated life in our own lives, in the lives of our communities, in the life of the Congregation as a whole.

His great desire for solitude, to be alone with Jesus, did not cause him to isolate himself from his neighbour, but on the contrary, to be totally committed to helping them, to really share life with them, and to meet Jesus himself in each of them. In his little chapel, he painted three murals: one of the Sacred Heart, one of the Holy Family, and one of the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. For him, the Sacred Heart was the expression of love for Jesus, the adoration of Jesus.



‘All our being, all our moments, and all the beating of our heart belong to God, for everything comes from Him and exists only through Him.’ Anyone who says love, says imitation. The Holy Family was the imitation of Jesus in his silent years, consisting of obedience, manual labour, humility. ‘It is impossible for me to understand love without striving for imitation and without the need to share in all its crosses.’ Mary’s visit to Elizabeth was to bring Jesus to all people. ‘What does Mary do when she visits Elizabeth? She travels to sanctify John, to bring him the Good News, to evangelize him, not by her words, but by bringing Jesus to him, to his home.’

Charles lived as a hermit, but at the same time he had an ardent desire to proclaim Jesus to the end of the world. ‘I am ready to go to the end of the world and to live till the last judgment: to propagate Jesus and the Gospel.’ He was always there, day and night, for all who called on him, and the rest of the time that remained he knelt before the Blessed Sacrament.

A text that really moved me, which I found in an old book with a number of texts by Charles, I would like to share with you. ‘The perfect life consists in following Jesus inwardly and outwardly: inwardly by making our soul like his; outwardly by living one of the three forms of life of which he set an example: the silent life (Nazareth), the hermit life (the forty days in the desert), and the public life (the three years of his preaching). These three ways of life are equally perfect because all three were lived by Jesus who, as God, was equally perfect at all times of his earthly life.’

It is as if Charles invites us to choose between one of these three ways of life. They are different, of course, but when we take a closer look at Charles' life, we actually see the three ways of life in it. He strived to follow Jesus radically in his silent life; he strived to follow Jesus in the desert, and very literally so; and finally, he became a person who gave himself away completely, as Jesus was open to all who came to him.

A little further on we read: 'I see very clearly, so that I can no longer doubt, that my calling, the will of God, is to follow Him in perfect imitation of His life. My only measure is love.'



The perfect life consists in following Jesus inwardly and outwardly: inwardly by making our soul like his; outwardly by living one of the three forms of life of which he set an example: the silent life, the hermit life, and the public life.

Every life should include some experience in the desert, time, good time spent with God and God alone, time spent in prayer with Jesus, and perhaps we are called to pay more attention to silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. In every life, we should imitate the silent life of Jesus, by sanctifying our lives in most common

daily activities. Perhaps our community of brothers is the place to make this happen. Finally, we are all called to imitate Jesus in his loving and caring presence in the world, with a special attention to the poor and the sick, so essential to our charism of charity as Brothers of Charity.

Each moment will have its own time and its own specific content, but it will always be about following Jesus. This is the message that the new saint, Charles de Foucauld, wants to give us today. We can only be thankful for it! ¶

Bro. René Stockman



First Ethiopian brothers made their perpetual profession

For our Blessed Isidore Bakanja region in Ethiopia, 7 May 2022 was a memorable day. After twelve years of presence there, the first three Ethiopian brothers made their perpetual profession. Brother Elias and Brother Yoannes Mamo told me that they came from Hosanna and arrived in Addis Ababa on 17 October 2010 to get to know the Brothers of Charity and take their first steps in the Congregation under the leadership of Bro. Stan Goetschalckx. In 2009, a first candidate from Ethiopia had already started his novitiate in Tanzania and was the pioneer for the other candidates who found their way to the Congregation. It would be a long road, but they persevered! The foundation in Ethiopia was officially recognized by the Congregation one year later and the candidates started their formation. In 2014, we were able to welcome the first group from Ethiopia to our novitiate in Nairobi. Brothers Elias, Yoannes, and Paulos were among this first group and, after two years of novitiate and six years of temporary vows, they were accepted to join our congregation as religious brothers in perpetuity. Twelve years ago, they travelled the road from Hosanna to Addis Ababa, and now they travelled



this road again, symbolically, but the other way round this time, to the vicariate from which they came, to take this important step in their lives together with their families and their many friends. The fact that they have many friends there was reflected by the large turnout for their profession. It was a true testimony to the Congregation in this vicariate.

On the eve of their profession, we had a long talk with the bishop of the Vicariate of Hosanna, Mgr. Noel Seyoum Fransua, and reminisced about the past twelve years. Very soon after we started in Ethiopia, we were involved in the apostolate, perhaps too soon. The archbishop of Addis Ababa, Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel insisted on taking responsibility for the psychiatric centre in Gefersa near Addis. Run by the government and entrusted to the Catholic Church, the archbishop was looking for a congregation to run this centre. Several



congregations had already been approached, but refused when they saw the situation. The patients were still in a dilapidated old barracks, there was a new building but it was not yet in use, and the staff seemed to have very little interest and even less motivation. It would therefore be a difficult task for the brothers we brought together from various other African regions to start up this apostolate. However, we managed to transfer the patients very quickly to the new building and fundamentally improve their life situation. But it was still a difficult task to motivate the existing staff, especially since we could not yet bring in Ethiopian brothers. Ultimately, the agreement was not renewed and we left Gefersa, yet with a grateful feeling that we had been able to significantly improve the quality of life of the patients.

Meanwhile, the bishop of Awassa, Mgr. Migliorati, asked us to help with youth ministry and offered us a community building where students could stay, as well. We were able

to stay there for several years thanks to the good relationship with the bishop. Following his initiative, the brothers went to Yirgachefe where they took over a project of the Salesians and started a reception centre for children with intellectual disabilities. A wonderful initiative that still enjoys the local population's appreciation.



Twelve years ago, they travelled the road from Hosanna to Addis Ababa, and now they travelled this road again, symbolically, but the other way round this time, to the vicariate from which they came, to take this important step in their lives.

The next step was the Vicariate of Gambela, where an Italian doctor and a Spanish nurse, both named Maria, had been running the medical centre in Ambo with great dedication for several years. They had decided to return to their respective home countries, and through the vicariate they approached the Brothers of Charity, which led to us taking over the medical centre. Meanwhile, the successor of the deceased bishop of Awassa, Mgr. Roberto Bergamaschi, became the bishop of Gambela, so that we could continue our solid cooperation with him.



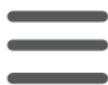
The last step was the Vicariate of Nekemte, where a former Lazarist general assistant, Mgr. Vargesse Thottamkara, was made bishop, and who, in turn, also sought the Congregation's help in running a medical centre and a kindergarten. This, too, was met with a positive response after consultation, but the recent unrest in the country delayed the takeover somewhat. Of course, we must not forget our two houses in Addis Ababa: the regional house, which is more or less the hub of the Congregation in Ethiopia, and the house in Mekanisa, which mainly serves as a formation house.

The perpetual profession of our three brothers was an opportunity to get to know the Vicariate of Hosanna, and again, the question was raised whether the Congregation could have a presence there, referring to the fact that they had already given the Congregation several brothers. We are getting more requests than we can respond to, but we remain open and dream

to have an effective presence in the cradle of the Congregation in Ethiopia in the future.

We are especially grateful for the brothers from other regions who are involved in the various apostolate projects in Ethiopia and not least for Bro. Gilbert who, as regional superior, is doing some really extraordinary work in guiding the young group of brothers and in the further development of the region, both structurally and in terms of content. For perhaps that is the secret of our success, if we may use that word here: the fact that we are careful to ensure that qualitative growth runs parallel to the quantitative growth. We can only hope that in the coming years we will be able to welcome even more local brothers who, together with the brothers from the other regions, will provide a living testimony as to how we, as an international congregation, can fulfil our mission locally, as well: to let God's love shine especially out to those who do not experience any love at all. ¶

Bro. René Stockman



Powerful witnesses of loving care

The day between the end of the retreat and the perpetual profession of five brothers in Tanzania was an opportunity to visit our three well-known apostolates in the Saint Dominic region: Marumba, Maendeleo, and Bangwe. Three names which of course remain abstract for those who do not know the region, but for those who do, their hearts will surely start beating a little faster.

On our way back from Kasulu, where we gave the retreat to the brothers, to Kigoma, we made our first stop. The sign on the asphalt road said 'BR Marumba', which we translated as 'Bad Road to Marumba'. Fortunately, it was not raining, so we could safely drive up the mountain. After a rather desolate landscape, we suddenly arrived at a beautiful planted forest, and there was the sign: 'Saint Dymphna Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre'. A little further on, as if in an oasis, we could see the humble buildings of our small psychiatric centre, where we were welcomed by Bro. Marc, the only Belgian brother still active in Tanzania. He took us for a walk through the centre, which we prefer to call a home. There, we met several patients who spontaneously came to introduce themselves. One of them, Mathias, has been at the home for several years and arrived in a completely neglected situation. 'I was very ill

when I arrived here, and had no one left to look after me. But now I am cured and I work here with Bro. Marc. I do all kinds of maintenance work and I am very happy here.’ The man spoke to us with pride as well as great gratitude. It was like a resurrection story, one that we have heard so often in our visits to mental health facilities around the world. A little further on we met a little old lady who had just been given a bath by one of the nurses. She came shuffling towards us with her walker and a smile on her face. She is one of the chronic patients who gets to spend her old age in the home. She has found peace here. She, too, was literally picked up from the street. But then we saw a patient who had only just been admitted. His hands were swollen and deformed, and he still bore the marks of the shackles he had been bound with for a long time. He had been freed from his chains and his life would gradually improve. Bro. Marc was confident that, within a few weeks, this man would be able to return to his family, healed. A father of eight who was shackled by his own children: it is a tragic story. However, the first step was



Saint Dymphna Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre, Marumba, Tanzania

taken: the chains were broken and now, partly due to the soothing environment of Marumba, this man would be able to experience the joy of resurrection in himself. Three encounters that have made a lasting impression and that wordlessly give shape to our charism of charity. I am grateful that, as a Brother of Charity, I was able to meet these three people here.

When we arrived in Kigoma, we stopped at an old house where the exit sign read 'Maendeleo'. It is a youth centre where everything began when Bro. Stan arrived in Kigoma with a group of refugees from Rwanda. The house was made available to him by the diocese and he started an open house where all were welcome. It became a youth centre of a very special kind. Apart from young people who came there for support during the day, it also took in young people who had literally lived on the street, as well as a few elderly people who had been picked up from the street, and the sick who started coming here after a while. It became a house with an open door, where everyone was welcome and was given a home. Maendeleo has now been in existence for more than 25 years, and it is still



Maendeleo Youth Centre, Kigoma, Tanzania

true to its founding philosophy, which Bro. Stan summarized very succinctly: ‘When someone in need comes knocking at our door, God sends us the means to help this person.’ Many young people here discovered the wealth of our charism of charity by effectively living with these people for a period of time and gradually experiencing that they were being called to become real brothers to them, responsible for the well-being of these neighbours. What a learning experience, which today’s young people really need. In the inner courtyard, Maendeleo’s residents were waiting for me, and Bro. Venance introduced them to me. There are people I have known for many years, like Babu, the home’s oldest resident. There is now also a group of young girls who come here to take sewing lessons and to learn the basics of bookkeeping so that they will be able to open their own small sewing workshop in the near future. After their training, they will be given a sewing machine on the condition that they bring part of their earnings to the centre, so as to give other young girls the opportunity to prepare for professional life. The group of boys sang the well-known Maendeleo song as a welcome and told us that thanks to the support they receive here, they are able to study. Finally, there were our friends who have a real home here and are lovingly cared for by these young people. Babu has been under the delusion for more than twenty years that all his cows were stolen, and he can continue to say it here without being contradicted. I thought he was a very old man twenty years ago, and he still is. What is this man’s secret that he is doing so well? It is

because of what is going on here in Maendeleo.

We ended in Bangwe, which grew from Maendeleo and is now a shelter for young people with intellectual disabilities. It was a quiet day, because those who come to the day centre had already gone home. Only the fifteen who also stay there at night were there. I was immediately led to the farm where one of the young people wanted to introduce me to the pigs he tended. He constantly wanted to hug me and hold me so tight that I almost had to be released from his grip. It was his way of expressing his joy when someone came to visit. Another young man, who had a physical as well as an auditory disability, took me to see his sewing machine and proudly showed me how well he could sew. In the small community house, Bro. Jonas told me that there are currently about 40 children in Bangwe, some of whom go to mainstream primary school. Yes, inclusion has made its appearance here too. But



Sheltered Home Bangwe, Tanzania

for most of them, the home itself is their home, where they spend the day and are looked after by the brothers. Here, the great theoretical concepts of special education are transformed into very concrete actions that again bear witness to our charism of charity. It is the love for these children that prevails and really forms the basis of the support.



Three encounters that have made a lasting impression and that wordlessly give shape to our charism of charity. I am grateful that, as a Brother of Charity, I was able to meet these three people here.

After these visits, we were looking forward even more intensely towards our five brothers' perpetual profession that was planned for the next day. From now on, these brothers will try to incarnate this charism of charity and become real people of resurrection in order to live and pass on to others the joy of the perspective of the resurrection. They all shared learning experiences in Marumba, Maendeleo, and Bangwe and completed them successfully. This will certainly add colour to their perpetual commitment! ¶



In memoriam

Brother Godfried Bekaert (1953-2022)

Beloved Brother Godfried,
It was in 1968 that we met each other for the first time, during a reflection camp in Sint-Job-in-'t-Goor. As 14- or 15-year-olds, we told each other our secret, that we wanted to become brothers, which we did. On 15 August 1972, now 50 years ago, you professed your first vows in the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity, and from then on you would go through life as a religious brother.

After the profession, which I made the following year, we were together as students at Guislain. We got to know each other better and allowed real friendship to grow. These were wonderful years in preparation for our later apostolic life. For you, it was the infirmary, where you took the place of our beloved Brother Clariet. For me, it was more studying, until I was able to return to Guislain with great joy to be the director. Even though our relationship was different at a professional level, we remained confreres and we were happy to be able to realize our ideals together. Your care for the sick in the infirmary was limitless. You were prepared day and night to literally be there for the sick at their bedside. How many you were able to help in their

transition to a better life with the Lord. It marked your life in a lasting way.

But you wanted more, you longed for a more radical life of service to the very poorest people. A short stay with the Missionaries of Charity Brothers of Mother Teresa in Paris opened new perspectives for you. However, you wanted to realize this as a Brother of Charity, faithful to the charism that permeated your life more and more. I will never forget that morning when we spent more time than usual at the breakfast table and the idea arose to take care of the poorest people in Ghent. It was the conception of the project that would later be called 'Triest House' and where, together with Brother Clariet, for so many years, you were a father, a mother, and a brother to the poorest people, whom you all knew by name. They were your children who were able to share generously in your immense love for them. Nothing was too much for you, serving them was your only desire. Triest House became a household name within the Congregation and



also in Ghent, and, with the many volunteers, a community was formed in the image of the first Christians, as we know them from the Acts of the Apostles: praying together, sharing what they themselves had received. Something new was born in the Congregation with the foundation of Triest House, initially not understood by everyone, a prophetic reinterpretation of our charism, whereby we headed for the periphery of today's society, to use a word dear to Pope Francis. It became an and/and situation: remaining faithful to the existing apostolic works but still being open to the new emergencies and generously seeking and finding responses to them. Brother Godfried, you have prophetically given shape to a new interpretation of our charism of charity, and it pained you to see how this ideal was departed from later on. Those who want to put everything into a set structure kill the necessary space for love to really grow. However, the East kept calling, and the desire to be able to visit Mother Teresa's tomb in India became the reason for a totally new commitment, or rather, a continuation of your charism in



They were your children who were able to share generously in your immense love for them. Nothing was too much for you, serving them was your only desire.

India, of which you were more and more deeply and profoundly inspired. You left Triest House with a certain amount of doubt, but at the same time you showed great willingness to go wherever the Congregation asked you to go. No, obedience was not an empty word for you, even though the link with your mother house, Guislain, remained like an uncut umbilical cord. For the young community of brothers in India, you became a living example of how to give shape to the ideal of charity. More than through words, your own way of life was a safe guide for the many young brothers we were privileged to welcome there. Your attention to a solid prayer life as the source of an equally solid apostolic commitment was demonstrated daily by the brothers and the sick who were cared for there. Later on, your service was extended to the whole Asian province. You travelled to the different regions to encourage the brothers there and to see to it that our charism was lived out purely and enthusiastically.

In recent years, you even received the responsibility for the whole Congregation to serve as General Councillor, in what were not easy circumstances.

Looking back at those 50 years of life as a Brother of Charity, I can say that there was not a single moment when we were not allowed to travel part of the way together in one way or another. What an inspiration, encouragement, and brotherly affection I have received from you all these years. In the words of the Psalmist: "How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one!"



Like precious ointment on the head, running down upon the beard, Upon the beard of Aaron, upon the collar of his robe. Like dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion. There the Lord has lavished blessings, life for evermore!” (Psalm 133).

Life everlasting, you have now entered the glory of God’s love, of which your life was like a pilgrimage, always longing to be with the Lord and to abide in his love.

When suffering came upon you quite suddenly, you prayed like the Lord in Gethsemane that this cup might pass from you. But you immediately added the very words of the Lord: “Not my will, but yours be done.” This had become the very refrain of your life, which you could now simply repeat with the utmost self-evidence, even at this moment when everything started to turn for the worse. If your whole life was already a model of great faith, you wanted to share this with us in a special way in your suffering and the way you said goodbye to life, to enter, in your own

words, the gate where the Lord would be waiting for you. Thank you, Brother Godfried, for this ultimate testimony of faith, hope, and love.



Dear Confreres and relatives of Brother Godfried, especially his beloved sister, his brothers, and his sisters-in-law, it is indeed with great pain in our hearts that we bid farewell to our beloved, our much-loved brother, but at the same time it is as if he is guiding us and showing us the way to the destination where we shall all arrive one day, and giving us the confidence that we must not be afraid, because dying is, as Therese of Lisieux so aptly put it, entering life. Our physical togetherness with Brother Godfried has now come to an end, but it continues in a spiritual togetherness beyond the boundaries of death. And because his love for us all is so great, we can be sure that he will continue to love us, perhaps even more, from his eternal home with the Lord whom he loved so fervently here on earth. We all look forward to this reunion in the hereafter.

Brother Godfried, until we meet again and
prepare a good place for us with the Lord. ¶

Farewell speech at the funeral

Bro. René Stockman



The Lord's Passion at Neuropsychiatric Centre of Kamenge

On April 15, 2022, the Apostolic Nuncio to Burundi, His Excellency Archbishop Dieudonné Datonou, arrived at our Neuropsychiatric Centre of Kamenge (CNPK) to celebrate the Way of the Cross and the Passion of our Lord with the hospitalised patients and their caregivers. He had requested for this opportunity a week before, through the parish priest of Saint John Baptist Church and our regional superior, Rev. Bro. Emile Nibigira. In the presence of the regional superior, the Director General of the centre Bro. Herménégilde Nduwimana, and all the other brothers present, we began the liturgy of the day presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio accompanied by Father Raymond, the assistant



treasurer of the archdiocese of Bujumbura and who is also our chaplain.

In his homily given in French and simultaneously translated into Kirundi, Mgr. Dieudonné expressed his closeness to the sick, whom he encouraged to understand that the difficulties or sufferings that beset us do not have the last word on us. He then exhorted the sick to always hope in the victory of the cross, like Christ, whose passion we were celebrating. Furthermore, he encouraged us never to despair but to entrust everything to God, with confidence.



The following day, the Apostolic Nuncio donated various food stuffs to the centre for the patients. All directly consumable goods were distributed to the patients on Easter Sunday, and the others were kept in the CNPK reserves for later consumption. The sick showed their joy in celebrating the Resurrection of the Lord in a special way, and were very grateful to His Excellency Archbishop Dieudonné Datonou for his act of generosity.

The regional administration and that of the Kamenge Neuropsychiatric Centre thank the Apostolic Nuncio to Burundi for the unique evangelical witness given in the history of our centre since its foundation in 1979. ¶



Bro. Michel Nahayo



Where is the Church headed?

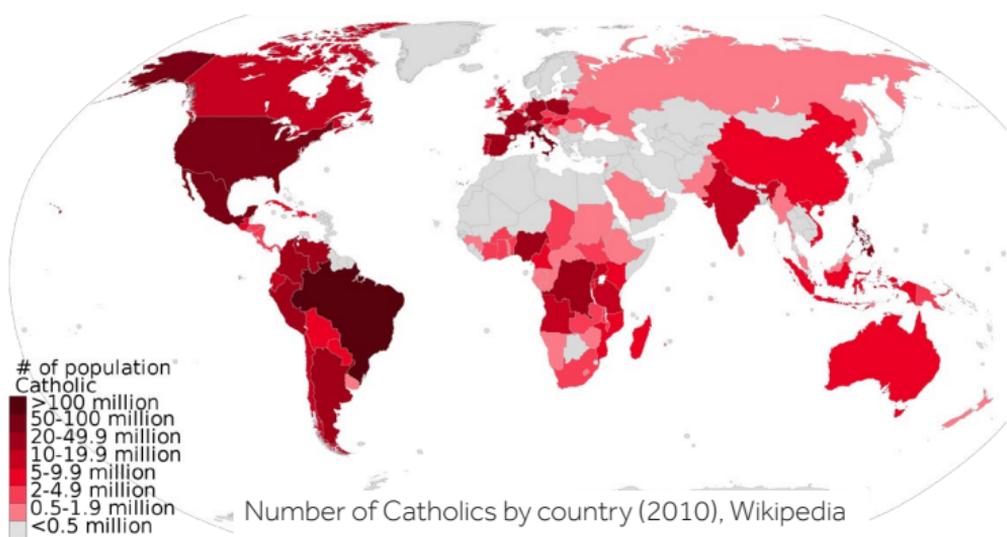
Statistics show that church balances are shifting. Whereas the Church in Europe might seem old and its presence diminishing, the growth in other continents is surprising. Until now, the ‘black pope’ was the name given to the Superior General of the Jesuits because of his ‘particular weight’ and because of the importance of the Order founded by Saint Ignatius. But if statistics help us to imagine the future world, then perhaps it is not absurd to suppose that a black pope could emerge from the next conclave, but black in the sense of being African. This is partly journalistic prophecy, but what matters more is to read and interpret the numbers. This is where the data from the *Annuario pontificio 2020* (The 2020 Pontifical Yearbook) and the *Annuario Statistico della Chiesa 2018* (The 2018 Statistical Yearbook of the Church) are helpful, precious instruments distributed by the Sala Stampa Vaticana (Holy See Press Office) in early March.

Two-speed continents

Well, the numbers confirm a trend that has been going on for some time, according to which the continents of the world are moving at two speeds with regard to the spread of the Catholic faith: there is an increase in Africa (and also, to a lesser

extent, in Asia), while Europe and America are lagging behind, blatantly so in some cases. This is not a recent phenomenon. Already in 2013, comparing the situation in 1978 with that in 2011, the magazine *Civiltà Cattolica* found that ‘the number of Catholics has increased a lot, as have their structures, especially in Africa and Asia, while the number has decreased in Europe. The centre of catholicity seems to be moving decisively towards the new continents and countries’.

The most recent data confirms this trend. Between 2013 and 2018, the number of Catholics rose from 1.254 billion to 1.329 billion, with an absolute increase of 75 million units, corresponding to a 6% increase. At the end of 2018, Catholics make up 18% of the world’s population. In America, Catholics make up two-thirds of the total population in percentage terms (63.7 per 100 inhabitants); Europe follows with 39.7; Oceania with 26.3; then Africa with 19.4; and Asia with 3.3 Catholics per 100 inhabitants. However, if we look at medium-term trends, we see that the African reality is on the rise.

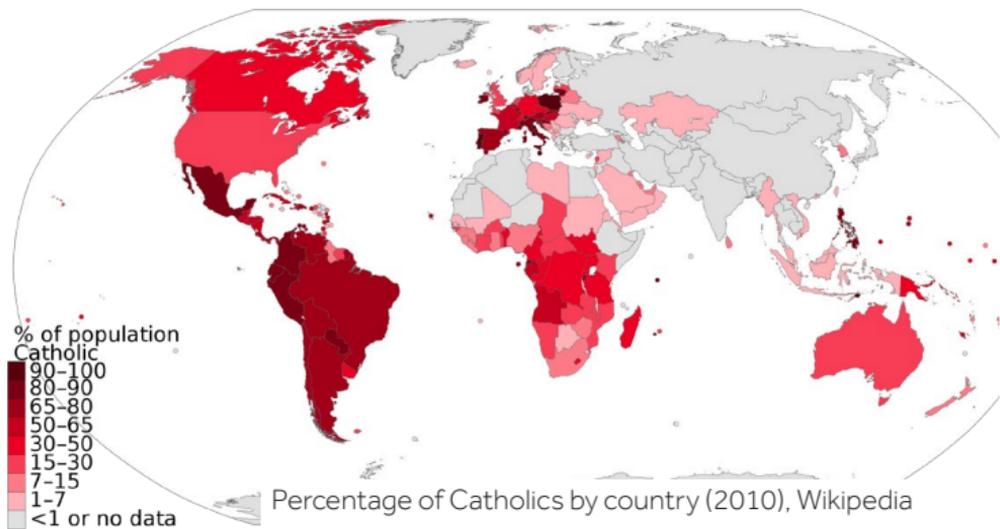


The 2016 *Annuario Statistico della Chiesa* (updated version of 2014) already showed that in the decade between 2005 and 2016, the number of people baptized had increased by 41%, well above the population growth rate.

Jenkins' prophecy

Anyone familiar with the works of Jenkins, a keen observer of the trend of Catholicism worldwide, knows that this American scholar and co-director for the Program on Historical Studies of Religion at Baylor University referred to Africa as the most promising country for global Catholicism, at least numerically, with countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria in mind. In a 2018 interview for the newspaper *L'Avvenire*, Jenkins made this prediction: 'With all due respect to the turnaround that Francis has made, I would like to say that the truly memorable event will be the election of an African pope.' Furthermore, Jenkins wrote in *Chiesa globale, la nuova mappa* (EMI 2014): 'In 1900, Africa had 100 million inhabitants, 6% of the world's population. In 2005, the number of Africans reached the billion mark, 15% of humanity. By 2050, the African population will be between 2 and 2.25 billion, almost a quarter of the world's population.' And he continues: 'At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most Catholic countries were France, Italy, and Germany. Within thirty years, it will be Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines.'

The Democratic Republic of Congo is projected to have the same number of Catholics as the



United States today. Predictions are made to be refuted, but if the trends are confirmed, it is easy to imagine that the face of the Catholic Church will change in an extremely meaningful way in a few decades.

Pastoral workers ‘made in Africa’

The official press release that accompanied the distribution of the *Annuario Pontificio 2020* and the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* stated with regard to Africa: ‘The geographical area with the greatest potential for providing pastoral services is confirmed. When the number of priests is considered in the time span between 2013 and 2018, we can see that their number increases well from 1400 units in the first period to then stabilize and then show a decrease in the last three years.

In contrast to the world average, the evolution of the number of priests in Africa and Asia is ‘quite reassuring’, with +14.3% and +11% respectively, while in the Americas it remains stable at an average of about 123,000 units. Europe and

Oceania, in particular, are the areas where the global downward trend is to be expected, as they show a decrease of 7% and just over 1% respectively in 2018 compared to the previous 5 years.

The number of seminarians in the world is also consolidating with a trend of a slight and gradual decrease. Candidates to the priesthood are down from a total of 118,251 units in 2013 to 115,880 in 2018, with an overall variation of the order of -2%. Europe (-15.6%) and America (-9.4%) are particularly affected by the decline. The exception – again – is Africa, which sees an increase of 15.6%.

If we consider the professed religious: the figures show a ‘sharp decline’ with a 7.5% decrease between 2013 and 2018 (from about 694,000 units in 2013 to less than 624,000) but this decline affects three continents (Europe, Oceania, and America) with meaningful negative variations (-15% in Europe, -14.8% in Oceania, and -12% in America). In contrast, ‘in Africa and Asia the increase is definitely permanent’, more than 9% for Africa and + 2.6% for Asia.

Let us move on to the professed religious non-priests. The crisis is not abating: we are talking about -8% between 2013 and 2018 (from more than 55,000 units to less than 41,000). Again, however, the downward trend is common to the different continents, but again with the exception of Africa and Asia where, by contrast, variations of an opposite sign are present, of +6.8% and +3.6% respectively.

A final remark on the theme of ‘apostolic personnel’: the fact that for decades the vast

majority of vocations originated from religious institutes and congregations from non-European continents seems to be confirmed today without any doubt when we take a closer look at the geographical origin of the male and female superiors: another element that serves for further reflection on the change that is taking place in the Catholic Church on a global level.

Be careful of the numbers

‘In the case of Africa, the statistics are misleading, especially those that absolutize the number of people baptized.’ Stefano Picciaredda, author of the chapter devoted to Africa in the rich volume *Il cristianesimo ai tempi di papa Francesco*, published by Laterza in 2018 under the editorship of Andrea Riccardi, warns against the danger of a superficial or triumphalist reading of the data. ‘South of the Sahara’, Picciaredda clarifies, ‘a very strong mobility of believers from one Church to another is observed.’ The believer, who may have been initiated and brought up in the faith in a Catholic environment, finds himself in front of a hypertrophied Christian selection, which comes not only from the traditional, evangelical, reformed Churches, but above all from the so-called ‘awakening Churches’ or neo-Protestant, according to another controversial description. It is certain, however, that if we consider African Christians as a whole, including the various Churches and denominations, we see a catch-up by a century – as a recent issue of the prestigious

International Bulletin of Mission Research signalled: in 2018, Africa, with 599 million believers, has surpassed both Latin America (for centuries the most Christian continent in the world), which ‘stops’ at 597 million, and Europe, in third place with 550 million.

Africa, the most promising continent today for the future of Christianity, is not immune to the virus that is spreading across the globe, the so-called ‘prosperity theology’, which fosters the idea of well-being (both physical and financial) as a sign of divine blessing. In an article written by two authors, *Teologia della prosperità. Il pericolo di un ‘Vangelo diverso’*, published in No 4034 of the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* in 2018, Fr. Antonio Spadaro and the Argentine Presbyterian pastor Marcelo Figueroa made it clear that ‘prosperity theology’ took root in Central America (in countries such as Guatemala and Costa Rica) and it has a real stronghold in Brazil, with *l’Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*. But, as mentioned, Africa and Asia have also been contaminated: examples include Uganda’s Miracle Center Cathedral and, for South Korea, the movement of pastor Paul Yonggi Cho. *Civiltà Cattolica*’s contribution documents well that it is mainly the poor who are the main victims of this distortion of the Gospel message: ‘It not only exasperates individualism and knocks down the sense of solidarity, but it pushes people to adopt a miracle-centered outlook, because faith alone – not social or political commitment – can procure prosperity. So the risk is that the poor who are fascinated by this pseudo-Gospel remain dazzled in a socio-

political emptiness that easily allows other forces to shape their world, making them innocuous and defenseless.’

The challenge of the megalopolis

A phenomenon with which the Church is increasingly confronted is that of the megalopolises. These are the cities with more than 10 million residents. In 2017, there were 33, 26 of which are located in developing countries. By 2030, there will be 6 more (according to data from the World Economic Forum). These will produce 15% of the world’s GDP and will be home to 9% of the earth’s population. With the exception of Chicago, others will be on the periphery of the Western world: Bogota (Columbia), Chennai (India), Luanda (Angola), Baghdad (Iraq), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). The city with the most inhabitants in 2030 will be the capital of Indonesia, Jakarta, with around 35 million inhabitants, and Tokyo, in Japan, which is close to that number. In third place is Karachi in Pakistan, with about 32 million inhabitants, followed by Manila, capital of the Philippines, with 30 million, and by Cairo, in Egypt, with 29 million inhabitants. The Church, too, is reflecting on the meaning and consequences of this phenomenon. It has done so, for example, in Latin America, with a continental meeting on urban pastoral ministry, which was held in Guadalajara, Mexico in October 2018 at the initiative of Fr. Benjamin Bravo, who has been exploring this topic for some time.

The purple of the periphery

As the Church is increasingly looking beyond Europe, the hierarchy must also change.

One of the most obvious processes of globalization of the Catholic community consists in the geographical-cultural expansion of the College of Cardinals, which is becoming more and more universal thanks to Francis (today, 67 cardinals, half of the total, were created by him). By the end of 2019, the situation will be as follows: 50 Europeans (including 20 Italians), 23 Latin Americans, 17 Africans, 14 Asians, 12 North Americans, 4 Oceanians. The prelates of the Old Continent are now less than half the total number of the electorate (there were 60 out of 115 in the 2013 conclave), while the Latin Americans have surpassed the Italians. With his sixth consistory, Pope Francis created a total of 70 cardinal-electors: 26 Europeans, 15 Latin Americans, 11 Asians, 10 Africans, 5 North Americans, 3 Oceanians. For the first time, starting in 2017 already, Churches with a limited number of believers have found representation in the 'Church's Senate', thanks to the Argentine pontifex: this is the case for Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Cape Verde, Haiti, Togo, the Central African Republic, and Mauritius.

The community of Pentecost

The face that the universal Church assumes, by way of conclusion, is increasingly varied, multiform, and 'multicoloured'. With the passage of time,

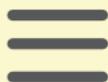
we must clearly acknowledge what Peter already proclaimed at the beginning of Christian history in Acts 10:34-35: 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.'

The Good News for us, Europeans – sons of a Church that seems tired and old at times, at risk of becoming aphasic and insignificant in the face of the challenges of tomorrow – is that in the world so many Churches are flourishing, which for a time we called young Churches, but which today, in spite of everything, demonstrate their maturity and their enviable dynamism.



The Good News for us, Europeans, is that in the world so many Churches are flourishing, which for a time we called young Churches, but which today, in spite of everything, demonstrate their maturity and their enviable dynamism.

An encouraging sign of this is the missionary zeal that some of them are showing in sending not only priests and sisters to the West, but, increasingly so, to all parts of the world, as part of a globalization of the proclamation that makes the mystery of Pentecost a reality. ¶



News from the General Administration

During the week of 20 April, we were able to have another General Council meeting again in the physical presence of the councillors in Rome. Of course, we commemorated the death of Bro. Godfried Bekaert, General Councillor, who passed away on 20 March, after a rather short but serious illness. Further on in this issue we look at the richly filled life of our dear confrere.

The following topics were addressed:

- **Fracarita International:** operations were evaluated and it was decided to strengthen the team with a few brothers from the South who will join the central office in Bruges. First of all, Bro. Ernest Ciza from Goma, DR Congo was asked to become a staff member at Fracarita International. Also, the strategic plan that was developed by Mr. Paul Segers, who will be Fracarita International's general coordinator from now on, was approved.
- **Servant Leadership Team:** there was an overview of the process that is being conducted within the Congregation to review the structure and content of the Congregation's operations at all levels.

- Meeting with provincial and regional superiors: a meeting is planned in Rome from 29 August to 9 September to which all provincial and regional superiors will be invited. The meeting could not take place last year due to the pandemic. The following topics were selected: follow-up of the motions of the 2018 General Chapter; challenges for the Congregation today (with a presentation by Andreas Machnik); follow-up of the work of the Servant Leadership Team; care for the religious and material patrimony; care for solidarity; vocation animation; associate members; amendments to the Constitutions.
- Ireland: At the invitation of the Regional Council of the Saint Joseph Region (Ireland and United Kingdom), the Superior General will travel to Ireland with the Europe's provincial superior to discuss the proposal for structural adjustment. In view of the age of the brothers, they are looking to pass on the apostolate in a responsible way, with great concern that the charism within the apostolate can be preserved.
- Philippines: In the Philippines, the existing psychiatric centre in Bicol is being converted into a college, in cooperation with the local government. The care for psychiatric patients will be continued on an outpatient basis.
- Dispensations: the following brothers with perpetual vows were granted dispensation from their religious vows: Bro. Bosco

Ndabekuranye (Rwanda), Bro. Theophile Luenge (DR Congo - Loreto), Bro. Pascal Murunguto (DR Congo - Loreto), Bro. Naman Gill (Pakistan), Bro. Gerard Kitengie (DR Congo - Loreto).

- Requests for perpetual vows: several brothers submitted their requests to profess their perpetual vows in 2023. We have started the procedures.
- Saint Vincent Region: in order to reach a final settlement of the conflict concerning the use of funds from the sale of congregational goods, the Vatican installed a joint commission that met for the first time on 13 May.



BURUNDI**First Burundian perpetual professions in own region**

On Saturday, 9 April 2022, two brothers pronounced their perpetual vows in Bujumbura, in the presence of Br. René Stockman, the Superior General.

Brother Marcus Ciza and Brother Grégoire Mukito, both from Burundi and belonging to the St. Charles Lwanga region, after practice of spiritual formation, they completed their professional training at our International Scholasticate in Nairobi, Kenya, and are now ready to begin their mission in the Congregation.



For the Burundian region, just recently established as an newly-formed autonomous region, it was a joyful day to celebrate the first

perpetual profession of two brothers from their own region.



We wish the two brothers a warm welcome to the Congregation and pray that they may persevere in their vocation.

TANZANIA

Perpetual professions in Kigoma

On Thursday, 2 June 2022, the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity in Kigoma, Tanzania, welcomed five brothers who professed their perpetual vows and were accepted by Superior General Brother René Stockman.

The bishop of Kigoma, Mgr. Joseph Mlola, presided over the Eucharist in the newly renovated cathedral.

After many years of formation, Brother Aloise Kafimbwi, Brother Daniel Kashinje, Brother

Francis Mbega, Brother Richard Mufwaya, and Brother Simoni Mgalla were able to take this step, which binds them for life as Brothers of Charity. We particularly wish the Saint Dominic region (Tanzania) all the best with these brothers and hope that, together with their confreres, they may spread the charism of charity in Tanzania.



TANZANIA

The Kigoma Training College's new accommodation

On Saturday 28 May 2022, Bro. René Stockman, Superior General of the Brothers of Charity and President of Fracarita International, opened the new main building of the Kigoma Training College. The joyful event is of special value for the further development of the college, which



currently has 600 students in the training courses for social workers, nurses, medical assistants, pharmaceutical assistants, legal assistants, and assistants in community development. Thanks to the support of the Committee of Friends of the Brothers of Charity in Belgium, the construction of classrooms, a pharmacy, and accommodation for the students can continue.



TANZANIA

The 'last stone' for a new community building in Kasaka



On that same day, the 'last' stone was laid for the new community building for the brothers working at the Saint Cornelius Psychiatric Centre in Kasaka near Kigoma. The last funds are currently being sought to complete the building so that the brothers can stay near their apostolate. This project was made possible with the support of the Committee of Friends of the Brothers of Charity, the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity, and Propaganda Fide in Rome.



BELGIUM

Graduation ceremony in Moerzeke

On Wednesday 29 June 2022, seven students who completed the course on ‘Social Teaching of the Church’ defended their final dissertation in Moerzeke.

Under the presidency of Brother René Stockman, president of the International Institute Canon Triest, and in the presence of Prof. Gaetan de Simone, representative of the Pontifical University Lateran in Rome, and the respective supervisors, four Brothers of Charity, one Brother of Saint Joseph from Burundi, and two Abizeramariya Sisters successfully completed their studies.

In the presence of the teachers and the staff of the Institute, the other students, and the friends



of the Brothers, the provisional certificates were awarded in the evening during the graduation ceremony in Moerzeke. Several speakers emphasized the importance of applying the social teaching of the Church to our daily lives and thus helping other fellow believers to take a stand with clear arguments on the many problem areas that are found in today's society.

In September, a new two-year course will start, leading to a 'Master of Social Teaching of the Church'.

ROMANIA

Fracarita Romania supports aid to Ukrainian refugees through Effata

Staff members of Effata, an educational centre for vulnerable children in Timisoara, Romania,



co-founded in 2001 by Bro. René Stockman and still followed by Fracarita International, developed an action plan in March 2022 to support Ukrainian children and their families fleeing their homeland. This support consists mainly of social and psychological help but also material aid such as clothing, food, toys, and medical supplies are provided through donations. Fracarita Romania, which is part of Fracarita International, decided to make this Effata initiative financially possible.



ROME

New associate members in Rome



On 15 June, two new associate members, Mr. Jos Leysen and Mr. Paul Segers, made their first promises as associate members of the Brothers of Charity in Rome. During the beautiful Eucharistic celebration, three other associate members from Belgium, Mr. Werner Van de Weghe, Mr. Hubert Pattijn, and Mr. Patrick De Pooter renewed their promises in the hands of Brother Superior General.

Prior to this celebration, they had a day of recollection, during which they reflected on our charism and had a chance to visit the Canon Peter Joseph Triest Museum, to become more familiar with our history and spirituality.

There are now nine associate members

connected to the Saint Vincent de Paul community in Rome, as the Romanian associate members also belong to this community. We pray for all the associate members that they may continue to grow in their relationship with God and in developing more sensitivity for the poor in their own state of life.



BURUNDI

Testimony about the Vincentian charism

Our associate members from Burundi, Mr. Boniface Nyampeta and his wife Mrs. Agnès Niragira, were asked by the International Committee of the Vincentian Family, which is working on the development of Vincentian retreat materials, to testify to what it means to live the Vincentian charism by means of an interview. They were very generous about sharing

their experiences of faith and commitment to the poor, which were greatly influenced by the life of the late Bro. Antoine Colpaert. He inspired them to become associate members of the Brothers of Charity, which eventually led them to discover the Vincentian charism that animates them in what they do in their daily lives. Their experiences will be included in the retreat materials prepared by the International Committee, which will soon be available in print and on the Vincentian Family website. The Vincentian retreat format will offer opportunities for both guided and self-guided retreats.



BELGIUM

Meeting with Associate Members of Flanders and the Walloon Region

On 21 May, about forty associate members and brothers of the Congregation of Brothers of Charity from Belgium met in Ghent, at the Brothers of Charity Motherhouse. They came from the three regions of Belgium: Flanders, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Capital Region. The communication took place via two main languages: Dutch and French.

This kind of meeting normally takes place every year. The COVID-19 pandemic did not allow it to be held in previous years. The objective is to show that, although we are different by region and language, the associate members are animated by the same charism, and inspired by their founder, Father Peter Joseph Triest.

The meeting was animated by Mr. Van Daele, president of the Associate Members of Belgium and deacon. During a Eucharistic celebration, he commented on the Gospel of St. John (John 21:1-19) which relates the third appearance of the Risen Lord to his disciples. This happened along the shores of Lake Tiberias, when the disciples had been fishing all night and haven't caught one fish; Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. They did this and caught so many fish that their nets began ripping apart.



An associate member, Mr. Charles Karemano, presented the table of past and future activities of the French speaking associate members and Mrs. Lies did the same for the Dutch speaking associate members.

Bro. Veron Raes recalled the Statutes of the Associate Members and asked them to make proposals on what they would like the Brothers to do with them collaboratively.



Brother André Payeur

1961-2022

Brother André, who was a missionary in Brazil, had been gravely ill for several months. During a sporting event with the young people he looked after as an educator, he had become unwell and suffered a severe stroke. He was attended to with much love and tender care, not least by his confrere, Bro. Eric Verdegem, but on 7 February, the gates of eternal life opened up before him. Brother André joined the Brothers of Charity in Montreal, Canada in 1984 and professed his first vows in 1986. This made him the youngest brother of the Saint Anne Province, which he would continue to be.

After completing his novitiate, he left for Peru, where he had his first experiences as a missionary. He returned to Canada two years later to continue his studies as a specialized educator. He would stay in Montreal for a few years, where he performed his apostolate in a school of the Brothers of Christian Instruction and later in Le Phare, a shelter for the poor run by the Brothers of Charity. At the same time, he continued to serve in Maison Triest, also in Montreal, where he was mainly responsible for practical and technical support. From the very beginning, Brother André's life was marked by service.

In 1995, he was offered a sabbatical year, during which the longing arose to become a missionary



again. This time, it was Brazil, where the Congregation had taken over a shelter for street children in Amoreira.

Brother André became a steady force there together with Brother Eric. He revealed himself as a beloved educator of the children, among whom he enjoyed great trust. In his simplicity, he knew how to descend into their hearts and touch them in a positive way. Many blossomed after a life of vagabondism on the streets and found their way back into society through the gentle hand of Brother André, to lead a new life.

Brother André was appreciated by all, because of

his simplicity, his humility, and his sincere love for the children. He was a man of few words, of punctuality in fulfilling his mission, with a great sense of equality. He incarnated great self-denial, the fruit of his deep religious life and his daily faithful presence with the Lord at prayer.

During the months that he was ill in bed, many of the young people he had helped and also the staff showed their great appreciation. They were deeply saddened to learn of Brother André's death.

He now rests among his loved ones in Amoreira, the place where he spent 25 years of his religious life and gave his very best. Thank you, Brother André, for your great example of humble service and unconditional love as a true Brother of Charity.

Brother Normand Lachance

1937-2022

Our dear Brother Normand left us on February 15 after several months of illness. He had a very full religious life. He came from a family of Christian farmers in St-Benoît de Beauce. After his elementary schooling, he met a Brother of Charity, a recruiter, who spoke to him about the vocation of a brother. His parents left him free to choose and to follow the path that the Lord had laid out for him.

From the very beginning of his entry into the community, he was given several responsibilities in several of our communities.



He entered the novitiate in Quebec City on August 1, 1956. After the required time of probation, on February 2, 1958, he pronounced his first vows.

In 1958, he was designated to the St-Benoît Hospital in Montreal as a tailor.

He made cassocks and provided various services. After a year of dedication, he was destined to Mont-St-Bernard de Sorel, a formation house for young brothers where he practiced his talents as a cook for three years.

He continued the following year to give his services at the Pius X School in Sherbrooke before being asked to go to the residence of our young scholastic brothers in Montreal in 1963. He was much appreciated by the young brothers

for his joy and simplicity. They liked to tease him and he appreciated that.

Our Brother Normand was much in demand by our various houses. In 1964, he went to provide valuable services at the St-Sulpice farm, among others as a cook and handyman. In 1970, he went to Beauport (Quebec), a residence specialized in mental health belonging to the brothers.

Then he spent several years in the community of St-Georges de Beauce (1970-1995), where he served as Sub-Superior and Local Councilor. His confreres commented at the time of his jubilee: "When you arrive at the residence of St-Georges de Beauce, a flowerbed welcomes you...it is already joy! You enter... plants smile at you and a good meal awaits you. It is Normand who takes care of each of his colleagues. The atmosphere is one of joy and serenity and you will want to come back."

In 1995, he began his apostolate at St-Bernard College in Drummondville before being asked by our community in Sorel in 1997 and again by the Accueil Beau-Rivage in Beauport in 2000.

Since 2005, he has resided in our community of St-Sulpice where he displays his talents as a cook, a gardener, a barber, a singer (participating in the parish choir), a decorator (always creative in decorating the chapel during the great liturgical feasts of the year), tending to the outdoor flowerbeds where the statues of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph are located. He attended a weekly prayer group at the Assumption parish accompanied by some associate members.

For several years, with one of his confreres, he

was among our greatest propagandists of our calendar, which was printed every year, in order to make known the Brothers of Charity and their missions.

Our Brother Normand remained there until his transfer in October 2019 to our new home at the St-Joseph residence in Nicolet where he died. A great devotee of the Virgin Mary, he had the opportunity to visit the Shrine to Our Lady in Medjugorje.

A true Brother of Charity, he prayed and lived in simplicity in the service of his brothers and those who were entrusted to him in his apostolate.

Brother Toon van Bergen

1939-2022

Toon grew up as the 6th child among 4 brothers and 4 sisters in the large Van Bergen family. As a young boy, Toon already felt called, literally by God, to the religious life. At the age of 13, he went to the Dr. Edward Poppe Juniorate in Etten-Leur and 4 years later to the postulate and novitiate of Sint-Paschalis in Oostrum. On 15 August 1958, Toon professed what had been in his heart all that time: he gave his life to God, to his neighbour, and to the community, without ever forgetting his family.

After his training as a general nurse and as a psychiatric nurse, Brother Toon worked the first years at Sint-Servaas in Venray. He was fully devoted to the people with mental illness and dedicated himself to the Comeo Mission



Club. Later on, as head and superior of the Dommeldal brotherhouse in Eindhoven, he was also committed to his elderly confreres who needed help and care. In the same period, he put his leadership qualities to use as a provincial councillor and vice-provincial. At Dommeldal, he spent 15 beautiful and happy years, as he wrote himself, but in the end, Brother Toon also went through a very difficult period. In the end, he was forced to literally take some distance. He moved to Sassenhout, Belgium, to come home to the brothers and sisters of that community, and to come home to himself again, through trial and error.

Coming home is something that suits Bro. Toon. When he exchanged his home in Sassenhout for a home on Heinsbergerweg in Roermond, he

continued to go to his room at Eikenburg every fortnight, to visit his family from there. That habit was ingrained in him. First, he faithfully visited his parents, and when they died, he went to see his brothers and sisters (-in-law). He listened to everyone and sometimes gave some sage advice. Because of his calm disposition, he was a very beloved uncle to his nieces and nephews, and he even became a 'grandfather' to some of their children. He was there when they needed him. It was also fun to just spend time together playing cards.

After 10 years in Roermond, Brother Toon was forced to move to Eikenburg last year. His time there soon turned out differently than expected when he had to start an intensive chemotherapy programme. He knew from previous experiences that this would not be easy, but he took it on with great hope. He was an example to us in that respect. But also in the way in which, when he felt in his final days that he would not be coming home again, he accepted that things were as they were. 'I am ready for the crossing', he said. Brother Toon, you have come home to your Heavenly Father. Rest in peace. We will look for a good home for your large collection of prayer cards after we have added your prayer card as the last one.

Brother Jos De Vos

1926-2022

Brother Vianney, as most people knew him,

was a household name in the Belgian world of psychiatric care. His whole life was dedicated to the care of psychiatric patients, first as a committed brother nurse, later as director of both the school for psychiatric nurses and psychiatric hospitals, where he remained co-director until a ripe old age.

From Wilrijk, he went to Ghent in the middle of the war years to join the Brothers of Charity, where he professed his first vows on 15 August 1944, after which he qualified as a psychiatric nurse. These were ten years of dedication in our psychiatric hospitals in Ghent, Zelzate, Mortsel, Dave, Manage, until he was sent to Leuven in 1955 to attend the teacher training school, but due to illness he was forced to withdraw. The next step in his professional career was taken when, in 1959, he became director of the Guislain School of Psychiatric Nursing in Ghent and was also a convent superior and a scholastics master. He turned out to be a strict superior, a skilful mentor of young people, and a wise director of the school. In 1964, he temporarily became responsible for the nursing sector within the Saint Vincent de Paul province and a provincial councillor. But, apparently, this position was a step too far for Bro. Vianney, and after two years he asked to resign as head of the sector and to return to his former task in the Guislain Institute. Deep in his heart, however, there was the desire to do missionary work. He was asked to leave for Rwanda in 1968 to start a new psychiatric centre there. But this too was short-lived, for internal conflicts were not his cup of tea. So, after one year, he returned to



Belgium to become superior and director of the St.-Kamillus Psychiatric Centre in Bierbeek, and became a provincial councillor again. In 1971, he returned to the Guislain where he continued his former work until 1980. After an interval of eight years as superior and director at the St.-Jan-Baptist Psychiatric Centre in Zelzate, he returns to Guislain in 1988, where he would remain superior and director until his official retirement. In 1991, he left for our convent rest home Saint Arnold's in Beernem to be superior there too, of elderly confreres this time, after which he was asked to go to Mortsel, as local superior and

member of the board of directors, a function he faithfully continued to fulfil until the convent was closed down. Illness forced him to come to our convent rest home Saint John's in Zelzate, where he received excellent care and could enjoy his old age, surrounded by his confreres.

Brother Vianney was a Brother of Charity who took his religious vocation very seriously and added his own colour to it: the colour of seriousness, thoroughness, and balance. Prayer, community life, and apostolate blended together seamlessly, and he consistently lived this out for his confreres, especially the young brothers whose leadership had been entrusted to him. With few words, they received what was essential. They were given clear guidance when he considered it necessary. With his profound knowledge of human nature, he knew how to value each one of them. He was a punctual leader for his staff, sociable, enjoying a good cigar, and skilled at receiving guests. He spent his free time reading and going for long walks every day, for which he willingly found an occasion, which kept both body and mind healthy. On the material front, he was content with very little, but he knew to appreciate when others needed a little more. 'There is no greater injustice than equality', was one of his sayings in that regard. Being wise, he was known to analyse events very critically and to make incisive comments. No-nonsense was his slogan and his way of life.

The Congregation is grateful that Bro. Vianney was able to spend so many years among us as an exemplary confrere, as a wise leader, as a

friend to those who, like him, were able to look at reality in a critical way. He may now rest with the Lord, to whom he gave his whole life without reservation and with all his heart. He will now be wholeheartedly received into God's glory.

Brother Maurits Degryse

1925-2022

To meet Brother Maurits was to meet joy and to receive a few apt remarks that only he could make. Originating from Eernegem in West Flanders in Belgium, a young Georges Degryse went to Ghent to become a postulant there in 1942, and, after his novitiate training, he professed his first vows in 1943. Following his professional training as a teacher, he started working with children with intellectual disabilities at the Saint Joseph Institute in Zwijnaarde, where he would teach the little ones using the method of Bro. Ebergiste. Being a sportsman, he was able to train himself in physical education, and also obtained a certificate as an educator of children with disabilities. After a short break in 1951, when he went to Lummen for one year to teach in the vocational school, he returned to Saint Joseph's, where he would henceforth teach in the vocational school and be responsible for physical education.

In 1969, his life took a turn when he was asked to become the bursar of a psychiatric centre. He studied in Sint-Truiden and also specialized in



hospital policy, so that he became one of the key figures of the Strop Complex as the bursar of both the Saint Julian Institute and the Saint Alphonsus Hospital from 1970 onwards. His office in the Ijskelderstraat, or 'Ice Cellar Street', named after the cold temperature in this corridor during winter, became a refuge for everyone in need. If he himself was not there, his parrot 'Jaco' would welcome any visitors. Bro. Maurits knew every nook and cranny of both institutes, and he would photograph any incident, however small, and comment on it in his familiar style. He would compile books of calamities and report

on other events, as well. He had statistics about everything and kept precise track of weather conditions. When video was introduced on the market, Bro. Maurits was one of the first to go around the Institute filming, and he was there at all kinds of congregational events, invited or otherwise, to capture everything on film.

Then there was his garden, his Garden of Eden, where he practised organic gardening before the term existed, and followed by a group of cats, all of which were named as so-called incarnations of deceased brothers, we saw him every afternoon going across the street, away from Babylon, as he called the offices of the Provincialate. He was a happy man, a one-of-a-kind brother, original and extraordinarily gifted. When his professional activities were winding down, he would devote himself to study, and every week he would go to the city library to learn about a new subject. His exegetical knowledge was more than original, verging on the extreme, especially when he saw an opportunity to discuss it with other authority figures.

When the two communities within the Strop Complex merged in 1997, he moved to the Provincialate, but continued to faithfully attend the board meetings of both institutes and to be the go-to person whenever a technical problem arose. Major heart surgery did not prevent him from resuming his former activities, proudly counting the pills he took every meal.

He spent only a few years in our convent rest home Saint John's, where he peacefully passed away on 12 April 2022, as the oldest brother in the Congregation.

Brother Maurits took his religious vocation very seriously, true to his given word and always without compromise. He kept up with the times, had his own opinion about everything, but at the same time, he was prepared to conform to the views and decisions of his superiors, a combination that did him credit.

He was a sociable confrere and loved to spend time in the community, which was his only home. As long as I had the privilege of knowing him – since the end of the 1970s – I have never known him to go and see his family. He had really chosen to be with his new family, and that was enough for him.

His care for the small and the weak, for whom he clearly spoke up and took a stand, was the fruit of his charism that he shared as a Brother of Charity. We can only be grateful to have had Brother Maurits in our midst for so many years and we are sure that he will be more than welcome with his Father in heaven. May he rest in peace.





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