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A word of the superior general

Artisans of peace in community

"For where there are two or three gathered in my Name, I am present in their midst." (Mt 18:20)

Dear Betharramites,

Chapter seven of *Fratelli Tutti*, the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, makes us a very attractive invitation, valid for all times, to be "**artisans of peace.**" *Creative artisans, with ingenuity and audacity, capable of putting all our being and work into seeking paths of unity, reunion and reconciliation.*

We Betharramites, distributed in 57 **communities in mission** on four continents, are also *artisans of Peace* for the extension of the Kingdom of God. We do not do this task in isolation, but we have chosen a *lifestyle* in which *the community* is an essential element, not random or optional.

We are not together because we looked for each other. We know. Neither falling in love, nor friendship, nor mutual

interest has brought us together. We have been linked *by a common calling, a common faith and a common mission*. If these theological elements are dispensed with, the members of a community could build a group of singles, or friends, or even a team of apostolic tasks, but not *an evangelical community of artisan brothers of Peace*.

Just as the family is a primary group in which personal relationships are above institutional ones, so it should be in the religious community: more open and human (humanising) relationships that make us overcome our differences and shortcomings of all kinds, and They lead us to better share what we are and what we have.

Perhaps we have never talked so much about the *age of communication* but at the same time have never suffered so much loneliness... The virtual world has entered our communities and we frequently immerse ourselves (without much critical spirit) in a virtual space in which, apparently, we connect with many people, but at the same time are losing the taste for everyday work. We are very connected, but we are alone and unconcerned by that *artisanal mission* of building the community with dialogue and listening. This is how the days go by... and rarely do we have the concern to generate some quality moments in which our human and religious being emerges, where neither the *username* nor the *passwords* count... Those real spaces where we are as we are and that is enough for us, where We accept each other because we simply call ourselves *Betharramites*, and Jesus Christ lives among us.

In the past, the classic community model provided for everything. There was no craftsmanship. It was characterised by a rigid and incontestable discipline. Later, we went from one extreme to the other, becoming more liberal and individualistic ("Each one for himself and God for all"). We lost the *community mystique*, that is, cultivating strong convictions about the need and value of the religious community on mission. Safeguard the community as a gift received from God. Put your hands and heart at the service of everyday life.

Being **artisans of peace in community** means helping, from our own experience, the maturation and fulfillment of people. Take care of the brother. Confront him, but without judging him or condemning him when he makes a mistake. The first ones who have to guarantee this are their animators: the superiors. Always counting on the co-responsibility of *everyone* to create that "*atmosphere*" of fraternal

charity to which our old rule of life referred (born in 1969, while man travelled to the moon!). An atmosphere of fragile human beings, but in which you never breathe air contaminated by: indifference, discrimination, racism, materialism, power struggles, envy...

Since we were all personally called to follow Jesus Christ in community, let us remember that each one is responsible for his vocation. That is why we cannot spend our whole lives holding the community or the congregation responsible for our misfortunes..., which often have very personal causes and explanations. This means that you not only have to take from the community but you have to contribute to it. Or in ecclesial language, not only be consumers of the community but also its builders.

The contribution of the human sciences has helped a lot to improve the functioning of communities, but it is not enough, because the community is a Gift from God, before being a simple human project. Each person, each human heart, is *a mystery before me that speaks to me about God...*

The ultimate vocation of the human being is love and this lived in community. Success and failure in love and coexistence (which can be seen from the first pages of Genesis), will mark the success or failure of human life...

It was Jesus who came to be among us, in community, "as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). Being true *artisans of peace in community* requires the incarnate gospel, trying to reproduce with daily gestures that magis (humble glory) of Jesus who breathes the Spirit on the gathered community and says "Shalom" to it (John 20, 15-31). The General Chapter has reminded us of this and the Acts express it this way:

No. 29: *Christ wants to be present with his people as he passes by us today. He is a synodal "here I am." We are not alone, we are together and we walk together. In fractured societies, in a Church where sensitivities can cause division, our spirituality invites us to live the sweetness and humility of the Heart of Jesus, and thus become artisans of communion.*

No. 30: *In this way, we want to refound our Betharramite "being" to open ourselves more in our "doing": the mission in community, as servants of the Heart of Jesus in the heart of the world.*

No. 110. *"We dream of living in meaningful, open, welcoming,*

dialoguing, testimonial and attractive communities, which favor life, encounter and communion. In the mission of Betharram, the Chapter emphasizes the recovery of the community dimension as fundamental to our life as consecrated people. "...Reveal to the men of our time the tenderness and mercy, the loving face of God-Father." (Rule of Life n. 9) Here the mission of Betharram is expressed. Faced with that, we want to walk together, it is our way of being a community, living the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Let us make this desire of the brothers gathered in Chiang Mai 2023 our own as we journey in hope.

I send a fraternal embrace of Peace for everyone.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

Questions to share:

1. Which of the priorities that the General Chapter presents for communities in mission do you find most important or urgent? Why? How can we live them?

- *Synodality as a lifestyle.*
- *The mystique of the encounter*
- *The missionary spirit*
- *Ongoing conversion.*

2. Why would you say your community is a "community on mission"? Or does anything hold your community back from being a "community on mission"?

Artisans of peace... by Pope Francis

(Extracts from the Message for the celebration of the 53rd World Day of Peace, 2020)



Peace, a journey of reconciliation in fraternal communion

grow in our capacity to become men and women of peace.

[...]

...The Bible, especially in the words of the Prophets, reminds individuals and peoples of God's covenant with humanity, which entails renouncing our desire to dominate others and learning to see one another as persons, sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters. We should never encapsulate others in what they may have said or done, but value them for the promise that they embody. Only by choosing the path of respect can we break the spiral of vengeance and set out on the journey of hope.

For the followers of Christ, this journey is likewise sustained by the sacrament of Reconciliation, given by the Lord for the remission of sins of the baptized. This sacrament of the Church, which renews individuals and communities, bids us keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, who reconciled "all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). It requires us to set aside every act of violence in thought, word and deed, whether against our neighbours or against God's creation.

We are guided by the Gospel passage that tells of the following conversation between Peter and Jesus: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (Mt 18:21-22). This path of reconciliation is a summons to discover in the depths of our heart the power of forgiveness and the capacity to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters. When we learn to live in forgiveness, we

The grace of God our Father is bestowed as unconditional love. Having received his forgiveness in Christ, we can set out to offer that peace to the men and women of our time. Day by day, the Holy Spirit prompts in us ways of thinking and speaking that can make us artisans of justice and peace. ■



Artisans of peace in community



An unforgettable community peacemaker

| Fr. Piero Trameri scj

You become a craftsman by learning the tricks of the trade in the workshop. The problem is that “peace workshops” have apparently become increasingly rare. So where can you learn the trade?

I was lucky to know a brother who had this art of peace in his blood.

At 11 years old, I found myself, like so many other boys, in his workshop, in a small “vocations factory” run by competent professionals, assigned to diverse and varied roles. Among them was our artisan whose task was to forge men capable of relating to each other and building places of communion. He skillfully manipulated the most diverse “tools”: proximity and listening at all hours of the day, the hand on the shoulder, the reproach almost always softened, the little pinch on the cheek, the good tablet when we were sick and a bandage for every wound, a moment of fervour in the evening thanks to

anecdotes about the life of St Michael, the meticulous singing rehearsals, the “good night” whispered in the ear and the symphonic music to fall asleep with peace in my heart.

In the eyes of the many little apprentices that we were, eager to work all our lives in a workshop similar to that of Nazareth or the “farm” of Bétharram, our artisan had the appearance of a “father”, or master, very close to the only Master, capable of telling the secrets of life through simple parables and showing by example the paths that lead to harmony and fraternity.

After more than fifty years of experiences of fraternal life, lived, with alternating results, in the light of the teachings of the old workshop master, I had the chance to find him in community (he was then aged 90 years) and, once again at his school, to be able to give

a new shine to the “tools of the trade”.

S a m e technique and same teachings

Early in the morning, alone, in the chapel, like the Master on the mountain, to renew his “Here I am!” » at work, as always, to prepare the heart to listen to the Voice from above and to the barely whispered needs of the brothers. Then, with rapid steps, as if gliding through the morning still plunged in shadow, he joined his little old people at the retirement home to celebrate the life that dies then comes back to life, and to bring them words of comfort and hope.

Living in the Spirit and being close to everyone... the cornerstones for building peace in community.

Discreet presence, throughout the day, of a person at peace with himself and therefore capable of creating harmony in a diverse community, respectful of each person’s rhythms, kind to everyone.

Faced with others’ regrettable habit of sometimes indulging in community chatter, criticism and punctilious insistence on the negative aspects of people and situations, he had developed



Fr. Alessandro Del Grande scj (1914- 2007)

a simple and ingenious strategy, which belonged only to him: his face darkened slightly and, without reproaching anyone, he tried to change the subject with a candour that could only be understood with a smile. There was all the know-how of the craftsman, apparently simple

and almost naive, but which had matured over time and which was offered as a gift to young people preparing to realize the dream of an evangelical fraternity.

As in any “artisanal workshop”, history and traditions are important, with projects and objectives, and group spirit and a shared identity, the master craftsman did not miss the opportunity to speak to everyone about Saint Michael. He gave the impression of having known him personally, as he had breathed the air and atmosphere during his long years of “apprenticeship” in Betharram. He recalled the episodes of the saint’s life, his most ingenious intuitions; he cited his most precious “mantras”, sometimes using, almost to make them more authentic, the refined French he had learned at the foot of the Pyrenees and taught with passion all his life.

In his “workshop”, there was always a pure air of spirituality, free of the pressures of all kinds of intellectual cross currents, that it was good to breathe deeply to have the energy necessary to work for peace and fraternity in community

with small, safe and delicate touches of proximity, attention, tenderness, simple humanity.

Thank you, Father Alessandro, inimitable peacemaker. ■



Building peace in the community

| Fr. Reegan Vincent Nagamani scj

“Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

I am a religious of Betharram since 10 years and a priest since 5 years. When I was 17, I wanted to become a priest. At that time, I did not know the community life of fathers but I knew only the diocesan priests. When I entered the community of the Fathers of Betharram in Bangalore, I was surprised to see the fathers and brothers living, praying, eating and playing together. Finally, I liked community life, and so I continued my formation in the congregation of the Fathers of Betharram. I would say the joy is the most significant thing that I found in our Betharram community. We all are happy with little things. Obviously, joy is a gift of peace.

However, I do not deny the tensions between our community members. Because I’m sure no one is perfect and can boast of never arguing at all. At one

time or another, everyone is a witness, performer or victim of aggression. In the community, we sometimes see our members getting angry. It’s like at school, there are often arguments even between good friends. In the family life, some days we can feel the atmosphere is so shocking. In the big towns and in cities, there are often the attacks. In the world, we know, there are countries at war.

No one can deny the fact that the pressures, tensions and aggressions exist as evil exists. It is necessary to understand that where our aggression comes from, and what are the emotions that bother and disturbs our community life ?

Jealousy: sometimes we really want what others have. When you are ready to do anything to get it, it becomes dangerous. Many conflicts arise this way.

Selfishness: we tend to think first of ourselves, of our comfort, our

security, our success. We wish not to lose anything. We then live in competition with others.

Ignorance: we are wary of people who are different from us and whom we do not know. We reject them because we consider them strangers.

Anger: if someone upsets us, if we are humiliated. When we cannot express this, anger turns into a volcano under pressure and explodes into violence.

Revenge: when we are harmed, we seek to defend ourselves.

Fear: When fear invades us, our reactions are uncontrollable. We are ready to attack to defend ourselves, without thinking about the consequences of our actions.

Despite of all the tensions, pressures and turmoil, it is possible to build peace in our community. I was in the different communities in India before coming to France. I'm far away from my home. In my community, we are all from different origins. So, we get to know others and I see that they are not so different from me. I am Indian and I am comfortable with my African brothers and a French brother. It's important to be united as

brothers. All for peace. I am convinced that peace requires a lot of patience, hard-work and hope. It's up to us all to build peace little by little, and that starts with tiny gestures. Fortunately, the atmosphere in the community life provides the means to cultivate and build peace.

Dialogue : there are community meetings where I can express my thoughts, my agreements and my disagreements. Father Sylvain, the superior of my community, often reminds me that through dialogue, one can express and get enlightened.

Be tolerant: There are things that separate us and others that bind us. Why always to highlight that which separates us? We can also see what brings us together by tolerance.

Cultivate yourself: I am in Bétharram in France and here I am surrounded by different generations of fathers, different cultures and different languages. Important is that we respect



Fraternal Agape

each other.

Be in agreement with yourself: I perceive my community member as he is, unique, and he has his own values and his convictions, as I do. So, I don't need to urge him to take my ideas.

Keeping humor: it's a one the ways that unites our community especially at the dining table. We laugh together with the anecdotes of our old fathers and brothers, narrated by Fr. Firmin, Fr. Laurent and Fr. Jean-Marie etc.

Forgive: I have experienced and I experience this forgiveness as an extraordinary event along with my fellow-brotheren. We dare to ask each other the forgiveness. I learnt that we need to reconcile otherwise I will be missing my fellow-brotheren even though we live in the same house.

The foundation and base of peace is love. The way that Jesus showed us can be summed up in one sentence, "Love one another as I have loved you." Loving others is not always easy! It forces us to think about the consequences of

our words and actions. Being myself, do I hurt the other? For this, peace is also, and always, to be seeked and maintained.

Prayer helps us to love God and love others. Praying is like recharging our dead batteries ! Prayer helps us to be united. God's love opens our hearts and gives us the strength to love and manifest our love. Each time I share peace with my community members during the holy mass, I say it with all my heart.

Being a Betharramite, I am invited to be in the presence of the Lord and to be signs of the presence of God for others. Jesus, by his presence, showed us that every one is loved by God. I am being religious, carry this presence of God within me. Being aware of his presence, to build peace in the community is possible by reminding myself that every one is precious in the eyes of God and therefore I see others as like him, that they are precious in my eyes too ! **We are all for peace ! ■**



How to be a peacemaker in a community... far from home

| Fr. Joseph Ouedraogo scj
(from Burkina Faso)

Peace is a basic necessity for the development and balance of every human being. It allows everyone to live happily and freely. Where there is

peace, everything is in harmony and conviviality, everything evolves and develops. And progress becomes possible. We are having this experience

with Côte d'Ivoire, which has emerged from crisis and is moving into peace, is experiencing a certain stability and significant development, both in terms of infrastructure and human resources. We believe that if we initiated such a development, it is firstly because we understood that as citizens of the same country we form a single family and that the desire for peace necessarily animated everyone. This is in fact what Pope Benedict XVI said in the message he delivered on World Peace Day in 2013: *"the achievement of peace depends above all on the recognition of being, in God, a single human family. This is structured, as the Encyclical Pacem in Terris taught, through interpersonal relationships and institutions supported and animated by a community 'we', implying a moral order, internal and external, where reciprocal rights and corresponding duties are sincerely recognized, according to truth and justice"*. The emphasis in this affirmation is placed on the need for awareness that in this world we all form a single family and that peace is a positive reality which is close to the heart of every human being, because we desire to live fulfilment, in safety in a healthy environment where we feel at home. For us this environment is the community in which we live with the awareness that we are a family.

Unfortunately, today in certain parts of the world, there is no peace. There is chaos, desolation, insecurity, discomfort, regression on all levels, an-

animosity is gaining ground. The news makes us think of the Israel-Palestine conflict which never ends and which tends to make people think that war is their identity. And yet, NO. In this crisis scenario, we cannot ignore the Sahel countries, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which have been facing a terrorism crisis for several years. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of leaders and the desire for peace of the citizens of the Association of Sahel States, things are tending to return to normal.

In view of all this, there is a universal call from the Church of Christ to be peacemakers. A call addressed to all. And we religious are invited to pray and work for a culture of peace in the world, by ourselves becoming peacemakers in our communities. The world seeks to restore peace through arms. But we know how to seek it thanks to Love and truth which meet, and justice and peace which embrace. (Ps 85.10)

For peace to reign in the world, it must start with everyone, in their environment. How can we become true peacemakers in our communities:

First of all, the first peacemaker is God himself. The Bible shows us through the history of the people of Israel the long work of God to restore the broken peace with his creatures, with his people. Through his incarnation, he manifests his desire to restore human dignity and lead us to its fulfilment. God's work of peace has reached its fullness in the person and work of Je-



It is important to take every opportunity to commune and to consolidate our ties.

sus Christ, a work of salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation.

Peace comes from God. It is Christ himself who gives it to us and who guarantees it in his presence: *"Peace I give you, my peace I leave you"*. If Christ gave it to us, it is so that we in turn can give it to others. The sign of peace that we give each other every day at mass is not insignificant. We do not give ourselves this peace just like that, but because it is the fruit of a sacrifice, of personal and collective effort. It costs everyone and it requires work because it is built and achieved through everyone's effort. This is why Christ, by inviting us to build a world of peace, wants us to be peacemakers.

In the words of Benedict XVI, *"the peacemaker, according to the beatitude of Jesus, is he who seeks the good of others, the complete good of the soul and the body, today and tomorrow"* .

Instead of just talking about peace,

we must seek it with all our hearts and cultivate it in truth, promoting living together.

Being a community peacemaker means making your contribution to building a more fraternal community. For peace to reign in the world, it must be a reality in our communities.

Being a community peacemaker means putting your talent and experience at the service of the community. Share your ideas and your know-how with your community, accepting the necessary and constructive criticism that may come from others. It's also about sharing moments of happiness with the whole community. Currently in Ivory Coast, the African Cup of Nations (CAN) is taking place, called the CAN of hospitality. It's impressive to see all the enthusiasm and atmosphere around this football festival. And it's a great opportunity to commune and consolidate our ties by living this passion for football with our brothers. We

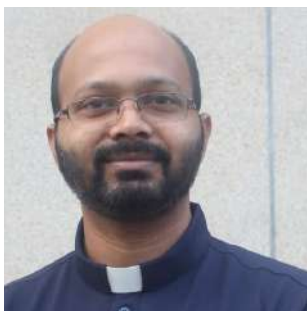
feel how everyone is passionate about football and is happy to follow a match with others.

Being a peacemaker in a community means working to safeguard community property and respect the dignity of each member of the community. To be a peacemaker is to experience forgiveness and reconciliation, the sacrament of God's love. Knowing how to offer this same forgiveness to others: *"Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we also forgive those who have trespassed against us"* we say in the prayer of the Our Father. To better experience this forgiveness, you must know how to question yourself and work on yourself.

When we talk about peace, we do not exclude conflict, disagreements, misunderstandings, injuries that can occur in our interpersonal relationships. We are religious, but above all men. With our characters, our cultural differences. Everyone has strengths

but also limits. However, beyond everything, we form a community of brothers capable of transcending our differences, resolving our conflicts to build and favor unity and peace: *"We can do all things in him who strengthens us"* (Ph 4:13).

I want to end my remarks by reaffirming that peace must be built. It is everyone's business and not just a group of people, even less our superiors. It is the business of all members of the community, each interacting 'within the limits of their position'. What some take for granted must be cultivated and preserved as an heirloom because others seek it as one seeks a precious pearl. Let us pray for each other. Let us encourage each other in our communities to work on ourselves for fraternal living together and let ourselves be led by the Spirit. ■



Nurturing unity: embracing the peacemaker's role in a community with linguistic diversity

| Fr. Rojo Thomas scj

India, known for its rich cultural mosaic and linguistic diversity, is a land where over 200 mother tongues are spoken. This incredible variety brings with it both the beauty of different traditions and the potential for misunderstandings

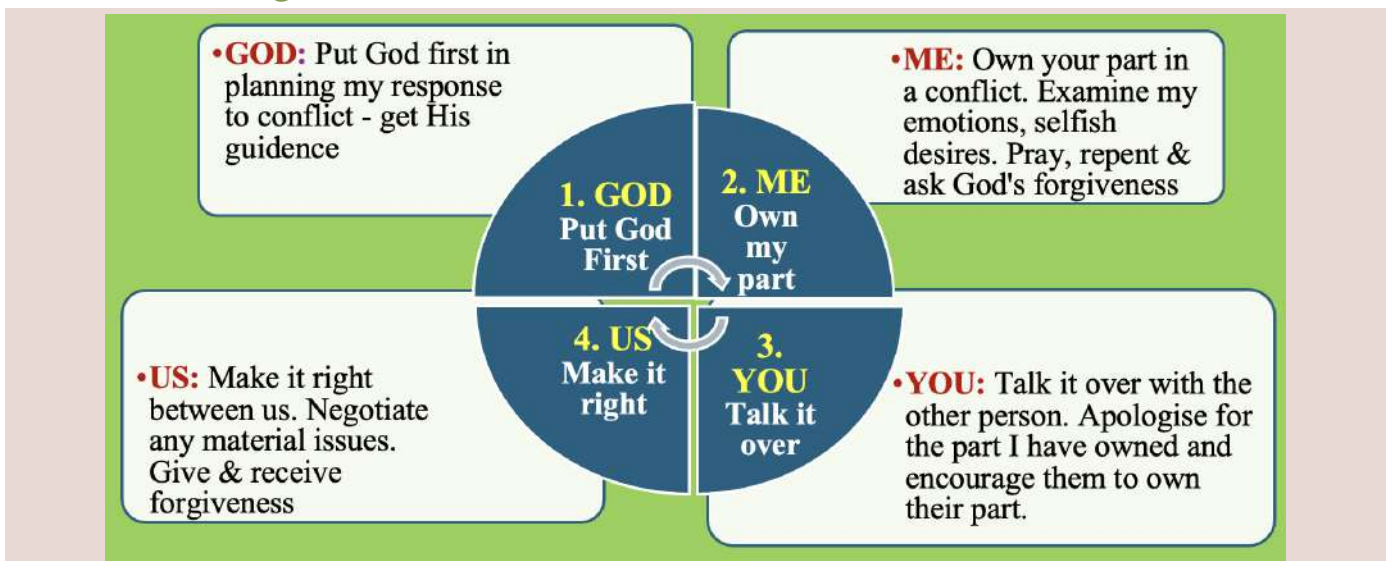
and miscommunications. In such a vibrant culture, the role of peacemakers becomes crucial to building bridges of understanding and unity within the diverse groups and in a community, consists of people from different language and

cultural background.

Peacemakers refer to individuals or entities actively involved in promoting peace, resolving conflicts, and fostering understanding within communities or societies. These individuals work towards reconciliation, harmony, and the prevention or resolution of

disputes or tensions. Peacemakers in general can include diplomats, mediators, community leaders, activists, or anyone committed to creating an environment of peace and cooperation. Their efforts may range from facilitating dialogues to mediating conflicts and promoting cultural understanding.

Peace-Making Process



Guiding Principles of a Peacemaker

- **Achieve inner peace:** - A peacemaker must be a person with integral personality, who could master and control the individual self of him/her in totality.
- **Prioritize listening over speaking:** - The second quality of a peacemaker is his/her remarkable capacity and humility to listen others rather than forcing one's instructions and authority over the other.
- **Cultivate genuine interest in others:** - A peacemaker must be a person without prejudices or presupposed ideas or with a judgemental attitude.
- **Don't be afraid of conflict:** - Conflicts and misunderstandings are part and parcel of the process of building peace, therefore a peacemaker would show self confidence and courage when confronted by conflicts.
- **Respond rather than react:** - A peacemaker must be a tranquil or composed person so that he/she will deal with the problems in a mature way, guided by reason rather than emotion. That is to say that a peacemaker would

respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively.

- **Adopt a we-centered mindset over a me-centered one:** - A person who is genuinely involved in building of peace must adapt a mind-set of other-centered than me-centered.
- **Surrender your ego. Forgive others. Forgive yourself. Ask for forgiveness. Keep moving:** - A peacemaker mustn't carry his/her ego, anger or grudge so that he/she can involve in this great mission with full freedom and sincerity.

Role of a Betharramite Peacemaker in contributing to peace in a community with linguistic diversity

These are some of the ways in which peacemakers can contribute to fostering peace in our communities with linguistic diversity.

Embrace Cultural Sensitivity

Understanding and respecting the variations of different cultures is the first step towards becoming a peacemaker. Each of our community members comes with his own set of traditions, customs, and beliefs. By actively engaging in cultural exchange, one can promote empathy and build bridges of understanding. So, attending local festivals, participating in cultural events, and learning about the unique histories tied to each language would bring peace and joy in our communities.

Promote Inclusive Communication

In a country where communication takes place in more than 200 languages, it's essential to encourage inclusive communication. If each of us can take the initiative to learn a few basic phrases in different languages, fostering a sense of belonging among diverse communities and shows our openness to others and their culture. Additionally, using common languages or employing interpreters in the official meetings can ensure that everyone is included in discussions, reducing the chances of misunderstandings.

Education for Peace

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping perspectives and dismantling stereotypes. The formators can actively contribute by promoting educational initiatives that celebrate linguistic diversity and highlight the contributions of different language groups to the development of our congregation. In this regard, inclusion and training of diverse languages and their importance in the stages of formation can help create an environment of tolerance and appreciation for linguistic differences.

Community Building

Building strong community bonds is essential for sustainable peace. The

animators of the communities can initiate and participate in community-building activities that transcend linguistic boundaries. Whether through collaborative projects, shared responsibilities or missions, creating opportunities for members to come together, helps break down barriers and build a sense of one family.

In short, *"Peace begins with a smile"* says St Mother Teresa of Kolkata. In a nation with more than 200 mother tongues, the role of peacemakers is paramount in fostering understanding, tolerance, and unity.

By embracing cultural sensitivity, promoting inclusive communication, championing education and formation for establishing peace, and actively participating in conflict resolution, individuals can contribute to building a harmonious community. In doing so, they play a vital role in weaving the diverse threads of India's linguistic tapestry into a beautiful and cohesive fabric of peace and unity. All are invited to remind each other that we are called to build bridges not walls. May St Michael our Father and Our Mother of Betharram encourage all of us to be peacemakers and to walk an extra mile to bring peace. ■



Peacemakers in a community...
remembering the free love God has for each of us

| **Fr. Tiziano Pozzi scj**

For more than 10 years, the Centrafrican Republic has known an unstable situation. Security is really precarious, particularly in the North-West regions, but not only. Of course, it has truly heavy consequences at all levels: social, political, economical. Among all this precarity, we are called to be artisans of peace, first in community, then towards everybody.

I think one can be an artisan of peace in a community only by being truthful. We must have the courage

to accept the challenge of truth between us and to stay under the action of the Holy Spirit, which leads to full Truth. And our Truth is Jesus-Christ.

How easily one can let himself lie to his brothers by hiding behind the "success" of the mission entrusted to us. One perhaps lies also to avoid disturbing the general quietness. Each of us has his share of responsibility to keep the truth alive in community. We must endeavour to be "living stones".

To be artisans of peace in community, we must commit ourselves to live our consecration, our mission, as a form of compassion. According to me, compassion, in each of our communities, should be the fundamental attitude, a light which should never die out. How often the Gospel shows us, presents to us the compassion of Jesus with infinite shades in thousands of ways!

I truly believe that an indissociable link exists between compassion and peace in community life. Only compassion can make our communities live, even on rubbles, beyond all the errors and omissions.

To be compassionate, to put compassion in the center of our community life, here is a beautiful challenge. The first thing to do is to set aside our selfishness and our wish, never totally extinct, to judge our brothers ; we must take care not to exploit to our advantage the frailties and sufferings of our brothers. Let us always remember the free love God has for each of us, as we are.

Dear brothers, let us also rediscover the attitude of Benevolence, not only in its pejorative meaning of pity, superiority, but in the true meaning of this word : truly searching my brothers' good, even perhaps by giving up some of my

"rights", more or less legitimate. How difficult it is to give up our rights and our programs! "Sorry, I have already organized everything and I can't give up anything!" ... And yet, in front of an attractive unexpected event, we set aside our program which apparently was impossible to delay.

To be artisans of peace in community, listening to one another is essential, as the reciprocal respect. And above all, we must commit ourselves to promote corresponsibility in the mission entrusted to us by the Congregation. It does not only mean distributing the different tasks and different fields of action, but also supporting among the community the various talents, the particular vocation of each religious. We are neither similar, nor to homologate according to a precise mould!

It is a commitment which all, firstly the Superiors, must assume. In a religious community, the variety of received talents, of accomplished



services or activities, far from being a source of conflict or rivalry, is really a wealth serving the mission.

Each true artisan distinguishes himself by the attention and passion he puts in realizing his work. That is what also must be our rule : attention and passion towards our brother, so that he feels well, valorized in community, so that his dreams are achieved.

I am pleased to end my thoughts with the words uttered by the Bishops of Central Africa at the end of the last Episcopal Conference which

took place in January 2024. We can only be artisans of peace in community and towards everyone if *"we live the mission as an announce of the Good News by our words and by the testimony of our lives, under the sign of gratuity and giving oneself in the manner of Christ"*.

May our Father Saint Michael accompany us and encourage us to be true artisans of peace everywhere we are.

Greetings to all and "always forward!" ■



Growing as artisans of peace and happiness

| Fr. Laurent Bacho scj

I have been a formator, happy to live out this mission. I left the work of formation many years ago, so I am now an emeritus formator. I am the grandfather of today's young people in formation! Being aware of this, I would like to share some thoughts on this question, "How do you verify a young person's capacity to live fraternally in community, to move from 'I' to 'we'?"

What seems essential to me is that the 'I' of the individual has substance. It is important to have a "happy self-esteem"; the place to work on this is

spiritual accompaniment and deep dialogue with the formator. This requires good discernment to neither overvalue oneself, acknowledging one's failures, nor undervalue oneself by being jealous of others. Excessive concern for one's personal fulfilment, as well as a lack of confidence, becomes an obstacle in relation to others. Thus, when less self-preoccupied, the young person becomes more serene. Saint Michael Garicoits rightly speaks of a "happy medium". It is essential to keep in check illusions about oneself by identifying the images and roles that others may make



Young peacemakers (the latest formation session at Betharram in 2022)

us play. Knowing the truth about oneself is the necessary path to finding happiness in relation to others; fraternal life in community is indeed a happiness to be lived together. As one of our elders said, we are asked to give up much, but not the desire to live happily.

How do you verify the young person's aptitudes to become a creator of happiness in fraternal community life?

1 - Knowing how to recognize your own faults by presenting your failures and weaknesses to others, without reducing the community encounter to a presentation of your human or apostolic successes. Identifying in the young person their progress in the reality of sharing with others. Spotting snap judgments that remain at the subjective level, without allowing for nuances. Be-

ing able to ask for forgiveness but also becoming patient in the face of aggression and offence, daring to take the initiative for reconciliation.

2 - Having a capacity for interested and benevolent listening that allows others to express themselves without the risk of being judged. Being able to encourage by showing the positive when the other is overwhelmed by the negative. Living a "respectful companionship and cordial respect," as Saint Michael speaks of, requires proximity and distance to avoid indifference or fusion.

3 - Sharing with the community the various human and pastoral relationships while avoiding any exclusive relationships. Secrecy is harmful in the community, and everyone retreats to their own corner.

4 - The sense of service is a necessity; finding joy in serving others discreetly, allowing others to carry out their service. This requires giving compliments to others but also experiencing the frustration of what is not recognized by others. Daring to ask for advice and help shows one's limits; thus, solidarity grows, and other people feel more useful in their place in the community.

Fraternal life in community is not an option but a necessity desired by our Founder (RdV 95). This requires realism but also a desire to progress, some humility towards oneself, and a kindness and openness towards brothers. Meet-

ings with the teacher in formation are not times for the young person to showcase their successes, but an opportunity to dare to look without complacency at their failures and limits in order to bear them. This is a good place for verification. Seeking the truth in formation should go as far as welcoming delays and postponements compared to the path you envisioned yourself. The goal is to become a capable religious ("*idoneus*"), a good artisan of fraternity in the community. The required delay is not a punishment (even if it is perceived as such by those around it) but an opportunity of "*kairos*," a time to grow and progress. ■



The Perfect Shalom in Isaiah

| Fr. José Kumar scj

As people who live in the immediate context of war in Ukraine and Gaza, we hanker for a legitimate peace and tranquility in our society. But the dispensation we seek from the uncertainties and anxieties of the present society is just an outer reflection of a hunger for deep sense of calmness and serenity lacking in the person within.

God responds to such longing through prophet Isaiah in 26:3 by of-

fering a perfect peace: "*You will keep him in **perfect peace**, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.*" In the original Hebrew text, the perfect peace is voiced as "shalom, shalom." In Hebrew, the repetition of a word is to intensify the meaning signifying the superlative or the totality. Therefore, I would render it as 'perfect peace,' 'continuous peace' or 'complete peace' denoting the abundance and completeness of the

peace that God offers us. In the Hebrew scheme of things, shalom comprises more than the absence of war or disorder; it personifies a state of wholeness, welfare, and harmony in every aspect of life. Shalom incorporates peace with God, peace within oneself, peace in relationships, and peace within society.

pride of the high city. But in 26:1–6, one senses the subtle shift of focus towards the spiritual state of those within the gates of salvation that has been illustrated as peaceful and protected. His city of Jerusalem is a fortress whose walls are a guarantee of salvation, a promise that Shalom will be preserved.

Ingredients of Perfect Peace

Isa 26:1-6 provides an in-depth understanding of the mechanism of perfect peace. First, it speaks of a firm mind focused on God. The three-fold repetition of the name Yhwh in v.4 accentuates the name of true God in whom we must

place our trust to find our peace. This firmness refers to an unwavering trust and devotion to Yhwh, where the mind remains fixed regardless of the circumstances even when we are faced with trials and uncertainties.

Another key aspect of peace highlighted in 26:3 is the prophet's affirmation that those who have a 'dependent perspective' as opposed to proud self-confidence will have total peace. A loving dependence creates a peaceful trust in the rich power of



The Great Isaiah Scroll is the most important of the Qumran scrolls.

Historical Context

Isa 26:1-6 is an Israel's victory song over their inimical Moabite city. This conquest celebration takes a procession format to the sanctuary of Yhwh. However, the central theological point is a call to trust God who is the author of perfect peace. Judah can rely on its God as an eternal rock stable and unmovable (26:4). Yhwh has already exhibited his purpose in 25:1-5 by overcoming the ways of the wicked and in dismantling the human

God. It means relying on God's goodness, wisdom, and sovereignty. It involves putting our trust in his ability to guide, provide and fulfil his promises. When we trust God, we recognize that he has control and that his plans are ultimately for our benefit.

Trust Leads to Peace

Trust and peace are intrinsically interlinked and is of primal importance in Isaiah (7:9; 30:15; 32:17). The last word of v.3 'trusting' in participle is immediately followed in v.4 by the imperative 'trust' and is thus both catchphrase and leitmotiv. So, cultivation of trust in God will pave the way for deep and lasting peace. He frees us from the burden of trying to control every aspect of our lives and allows us to rest in his faithful care.

Humility Leads to Trust

The language in 26:1-6 recalls the programmatic representation of human pride brought low in 2:5-22. Isaiah emphasizes this point with four verbs demonstrating the ironic contrast between lofty and the actual humility. Mirages of majesty may overtake an individual but Yhwh himself is the one who truly dwells 'in the height' along with 'the righteous' in his eschatological kingdom. In an ironic volte-face, the despotic city is trodden underfoot by those who have normally been the victims of oppressive violence, the poor and

needy (vv.5-6). That is, admitting our limitations with humility brings out the trust necessary to receive the perfect shalom of Yhwh.

Contemporary Context

How do I make sense of this perfect peace in my daily Christian and community life? Rabbi Nachman writes, "*Peace is the unity of two opposites.*" The perfect peace of prophetic thought is the coexistence of conflicting points of view. Isa 65 contains the description of this unity of the two opposites: "*The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like an ox, but the serpent will have dust for its food. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.*" These opposite characters will exist but they exist in perfect unity and peace which Isaiah describes as "*new heaven and new earth.*" In other words, this perfect peace is not the abolition of difficulties and anxieties (1Sam 1:6-7; Job 6:1-2) but Yhwh's willingness to potentiate us in confronting these difficulties (Isa 41:10-13) provided we seek him with trust and humility. Thus, we can remain in peace even in the most difficult condition (Phil 4:6-7). ■

During the General Council gathered in January,

the Superior General and his Council presented to the diaconate:

- *Br. Jean-Claude Djiraud scj* and *Br. Hyacinthe N'Cho Akpa scj* of the Saint Michael Garicoits Region (Vicariate of the Ivory Coast);
- *Br. Thiago Gordiano Sampaio scj* of the Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region (Vicariate of Brazil).

Br. Jean-Claude Djiraud was ordained a deacon in Pau on 10 February by Mgr. Marc Aillet, *while*

Br. Thiago Gordiano Sampaio will be ordained a deacon on February 25 in Nova Granada (Belo Horizonte, Brazil) and Br. Hyacinthe N'Cho Akpa will be ordained on March 9 in Adiapodoumé (Ivory Coast).

The following decisions have been adopted:

For Saint Michael Garicoits Region:

- Suppression of the community of Langhirano and opening of the Community of Sissa Trecasali in the same Diocese of Parma (Vicariate of Italy);

For Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Region:

- Appointment of Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez as Master of Scholastics and Superior of the Formation Community of Belo Horizonte (Vicariate of Brazil);
- Appointment of Fr. Francisco de Assis as Superior of the Community of Nova Fatima – Gavião (Vicariate of Brazil);
- Appointment of Fr. Marcelo Rodrigues da Silva as Superior of the Community of Sabará (Vicariate of Brazil);
- Suppression of the community of Lambaré - *Colegio San José Apostolico* and opening of the Community *Colegio San José Apostolico* and Ap-

pointment of Fr. Carlos Escurra as Superior (Vicariate of Paraguay);

- Suppression of the community Vila Matilde (SP)-Paulinia and of the community of Passa Quatro and opening of two communities: Community of Paulinia with appointment of Fr. Wagner Ferreira as Superior and Community of Vila Matilde (SP)-Passa Quatro with appointment of Fr. Gleci-mar Guilherme da Silva as Superior (Vicariate of Brazil);
- Suppression of the community San Juan Bautista and the Community of Barracas and opening of the Community San Juan Bautista-Barracas with appointment of Fr. Sebastián García as Superior (Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay);
- Appointment of Fr. Osmar Cáceres Spainí as Superior of the Community of Adrogué (Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay);

The homes of the Regional House and the Vicariate Houses for the Fr Etchecopar Region have been erected on the proposal of the Regional Superior and his Council:

- Residence "San Juan Bautista" in Buenos Aires (Argentina): home of the Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar and of the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay;
- Residence of Passa Quatro: home of the Vicariate of Brazil;
- Residence of Lambaré: home of the Vicariate of Paraguay.

In the Peace of the Lord

Italy | **Mr. Alberto Antonini**, brother of Fr. Andrea Antonini SCJ, of "San Michele" community in Albavilla, returned to the house of the Father on January 12th". We extend our deepest sympathies to Fr. Andrea and his family and pray for their dear one.

France | **Mr. Pierre Dantiacq**, aged 83, brother-in-law of Fr Jean-Marie Ruspil SCJ and Fr Joseph Ruspil SCJ died on January 25. In hope, let our prayer join that of the family to whom we express our fraternal friendship.





From “Missionary of Hasparren” to “Religious of Betharram”

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

Hasparren is a name dear to the history of the Congregation. Three of St Michael’s first companions, Frs Guimon, Perguilhem and Fondeville, were originally Missionaries of Hasparren. And it was the Statutes of this small band of missionaries which our Founder adopted in 1835 as the initial Rules of Life for the burgeoning community of Betharram.

When, later, the Bishop Mgr Lacroix was thinking about sending missionaries to evangelise the Basque immigrants in Argentina, he first asked the Hasparren fathers if they were prepared to take on this difficult task; since they were unable to respond to his approach, it was the Betharramites who agreed to set off for Buenos Aires in 1856. Whether by a stroke of luck or Divine Providence, in 1861 a former

Missionary from Hasparren, Fr Sarraute (who later became a Trappist) had founded a church in Montevideo which later became the first Betharramite residence in Uruguay.

The Missionaries of Hasparren were a society of diocesan priests, founded by Mgr d’Astros in 1821, to evangelise the Basques in the diocese of Bayonne. After the death (1847) of the 1st Superior appointed by the bishop, the society went into a tailspin due to the falling number of its members. On two occasions, in the time of Fr Etchécopar, negotiations had been started with a view to uniting the society of Hasparren with the Congregation of Betharram, but these came to nothing.

Things improved for the missionaries when Fr Jean-Pierre Arbelbide was elected Superior in 1888. He reintroduced religious life into his institute by reinstating

a novitiate and by the pronouncing of vows; two Apostolic Schools (junior seminaries) were opened in Mauléon and St-Jean-Pied-de-Port; a Scholasticate in Hasparren and lastly, a mission for the Basques was founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina, at the start of 1897.

This momentum and

1) Hasparren is a village in the Basque Country, approximately 30 km from Saint-Palais (France).

*At the beginning of the 19th century, the anticlericalism advocated by the revolutionary elites of 1789 was still alive and well. Throughout Europe, the Church was politically weakened and its spiritual power was highly contested; the Basque Country did not escape this observation. It is in this difficult context that the Church of France was launching a vast programme of internal missions, with the objectives of restoring its spiritual authority, encouraging new vocations, and reviving faith and religious practice. **In the Basque Country, Mgr. D’Astros, decided in 1821, on the creation of a “body of Missionaries under the patronage of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. After Bayonne and Larressore, the Missionaries settled permanently in Hasparren in 1826.***



Mosaic of the chapel of the Sacred Heart in Hasparren.

frenzy of activity, along with the keen desire to transform the society of missionaries into a religious community in its own right, was not well received by the diocesan curia. Certain measures taken by the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr Jauffret, and his *entourage* gave rise to the fear that the end of the missionary society was nigh. According to Fr Miéyaa, the Bishop had decided to close the Apostolic School in Mauléon, would not allow certain of the candidates put forward by the General Council of Hasparren to receive sacred orders, as he intended to embody all the missionaries who had decided to set off for the Argentine within the archdiocese of Buenos Aires.

Fr Arbelbide, who went to America with his first missionaries, had to return to France to save his foundation and keep his ideal of a religious congregation alive. Initially he tried to get his society recognised as a congregation of pontifical right by the Holy See. The negative response from Rome led him to take another path, namely uniting his society with that of Betharram. Both institutes shared one essential goal in their mission: that of evangelising the Basques in America.

And so it was that on 2 March 1898, Fr

Arbelbide wrote to Fr Bourdenne, Superior General of the Betharramites: *"You are aware that in 1887, I approached Rev Fr Etchécopar and asked that we be joined to Betharram. I am coming back to this idea today and am renewing the same request that you take us over... I am offering you seven or eight priests and about thirty young men, some are studying theology, others philosophy, and the remainder are progressing their secondary education..."*

Fr Bourdenne, who had recently been elected Superior General of Betharram after the death of Fr Etchécopar, welcomed this request which seemed to be providential in responding to a decision taken at the last General Chapter, to reinvigorate and rejuvenate the Betharramite mission to the Basques in Latin America.

On the other hand, knowing that according to the Law, the Missionaries of Hasparren were diocesan priests, it was not possible to get around the ruling and decisions of the Bishop of Bayonne. Bourdenne opened negotiations on two fronts: first he tackled the Bishop, Mgr Jauffret; and second, he sided with Fr Arbelbide and those who shared his cause¹,

1) *In fact, not all the Hasparren Missionaries were in*

among whom we should single out the director of the Apostolic School at St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, Fr Ospital.

A compromise was finally found, but this was not a genuine union. In effect, the two institutes, Betharram and Hasparren, were, according to canon law, two separate realities: the Betharramites had been an independent self-governing Religious Congregation under pontifical law (since 1875); whereas on the other hand, Hasparren was a diocesan institute, under the authority of the Bishop of Bayonne. Mgr Jauffret however agreed to grant all those who wished to become Betharramite a decree of excardination from his diocese.

As for Fr Bourdenne, he explained clearly that joining Betharram meant accepting the Congregation's own specific mission which was not limited to evangelising the Basques². He added: *"Surely the entry of these Fathers into the Congregation would be of precious help in developing work with the Basques. However, up to now, in the Institute, there had been no distinction between Basques, Bearnais or Bigourdans³, but only priests of the Sacred-Heart, sons of Fr Garicoits, with but one heart and one soul. There is nothing so close to our hearts as the prevention of anything that could*

agreement with this attempt by Fr Arbelbide to merge his institute with the Congregation of Betharram, particularly because not everyone shared the ideals of religious life desired and upheld by the Superior.

2) One example of the importance of this concept as expressed by Fr Bourdenne is what happened to Fr Emile Mila, one of the Hasparren Missionaries who joined Betharram: a few years after his profession, he was sent to England where he lived and worked for over 15 years and who was one of the first to reside in Droitwich.

3) Basques, Bearnais and Bigourdans are natives of the three historical regions around Betharram: the Basque Country, the Bearn and the Bigorre.

jeopardise this "Sint Unum" so beloved by the Rev Fr Garicoits in his preaching..."⁴

And so Hasparren made a gift to the Congregation of Betharram of several priests and theology students, for whom the residence at Almagro in Buenos Aires was opened, the Congregation's second Scholasticate after that in Bethlehem. In a lengthy letter, Fr Magendie writes of the inauguration of this new residence on August 30, 1898, and the opening of the novitiate for those members of Hasparren who had decided to become Betharramites: 5 priests⁵, 9 seminarians and 3 religious brothers. In addition, the entire Apostolic School at St-Jean-Pied-de-Port of around forty young men was welcomed into Betharram in the Autumn of 1898.

The group of priests from Hasparren reinforced the mission to the Basques in Buenos Aires and in Montevideo. Among the young Apostolic Scholars and postulants who entered Betharram were names which subsequently played an important role in the history of Betharram: Fr Pierre Erdozaincy-Etchart, founder and the first Superior of the Mission to Tali in China; Fr Jean-Baptiste Apetche, founder of the Betharramites in Brazil and of the *São Miguel* school in Passa Quatro; Fr Jean Larramendy, who restored the church at Ibarre and founded the first Betharramite residence in the Basque Country at St-Palais; Fr Benjamin Bordachar, the much-appreciated writer and founder of the magazine *"Les Rameaux de Notre-Dame"* [The Branches of Our Lady]. ■

4) Letter to Fr Magendie, March or April 1898.

5) Fr Arbelbide is not included in their number because the Bishop of Bayonne did not grant him the decree of excardination.



*My God, look not on my sins but upon this Society which your Sacred Heart has conceived and formed. Deign to grant it your peace, **that peace according to your will** which alone can pacify it and unite more closely all its members with each other, with their superiors and with your divine Heart, so that they may be one as you and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one. Amen. Fiat! Fiat!*

Saint Michael Garicoits



Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

Generalate House
via Angelo Brunetti, 27
00186 Rome - Italy
Phone +39 06 320 70 96
Email scj.generalate@gmail.com
www.betharram.net