

GENERAL BULLETIN

MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART

DECEMBER 2024

*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved
everywhere. Forever!*

Dear confreres.

Welcome to the last edition of the General Bulletin for 2024. December is a special month for us, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the 8th of December this year, our congregation celebrates its 170th anniversary. MSC is a religious congregation, so let us take this significant moment to reflect on our lives as consecrated religious.

The theme of this edition of the General Bulletin is religious life. We received many inspirational articles from you that will help us to deepen the meaning of our vocation as religious. There are also some articles related to the latest encyclical of Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos* ('He loved us'), an encyclical published on 24 October 2024, whose content is very much related to our identity, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And, of course, there are many more interesting articles or news from various MSC entities worldwide.

Thank you for the contribution of all the confreres who have sent articles for this newsletter. Thank you to the team of editors (Javier Trapero, John Walker MSC, Raymond Lièvre MSC) who always work hard for the publication of this General Bulletin. May this newsletter help us all to be more faithful in our lives as religious. Happy Reading.

| Fransiskus Bram Tulusan, MSC |





**Missionaries of the Sacred Heart
Celebrating 170 Years of Foundation**

Dear Confreres,

With deep joy and gratitude to the Heart of Jesus, we address each of you to commemorate a significant milestone: 170 years since our founder, Fr. Jules Chevalier, heard the call to witness the compassionate love of God in a wounded world; 170 years of life and mission as the MSC Congregation. It was on December 8, 1854, that Fr. Chevalier heard the echo of the Heart of Jesus, calling him to found a missionary institute as a response to the world's afflictions. Today, we are called to update how we live our charism, reimagine our structures, and write new pages of love and compassion in a world thirsting for meaning, with imagination and prophetic creativity.

With great hope, we can say that we have 1,560 reasons to celebrate these 170 years – the approximate number of MSC confrères worldwide. Moreover, we have about five hundred additional reasons to celebrate, when we consider the number of confrères in initial formation across the world.

For us MSC, there should be no room for discouragement, even though we live in a world beset by so many challenges, the war in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and the eastern Congo, among others. The problems of Safeguarding in the Church and in our Congregation. The ecological devastation of Mother Earth.

As I write this letter, I have received challenging news from two MSC places. Our two confrères in Mozambique have informed me that the situation of protests and police repression has reached the city of Pemba, where they live and work. They had to go immediately to pick up the formandi from the school where they study in order to get them to safety in Jules Chevalier House. Our confrères in South Korea informed us today that a grave situation is emerging in the political leadership of this beautiful and developed country; martial law was imposed and revoked. This has led to protests and calls for impeachment, generating a situation of terrible chaos where the People of God are affected.

In Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Northern Cameroon, our confrères also face complex situations. These are just a few of the many examples we could give of challenging situations in which we are celebrating today 170 years of missionary and prophetic self-giving and dedication amid challenging, complex, and, unfortunately, 'eternal' conflicts.

This year, I had the grace and opportunity to spend nine weeks in our largest Province, Indonesia. Listening personally and communally to the vast majority of members made me witness the MSC charism alive, resilient, vibrant, vulnerable, and committed in approximately 75 parishes and other ministries. In the vast areas of West Papua, I witnessed the presence of young confrères dedicating their lives to the People of God in parishes in the jungle and facing the overwhelming presence of companies that extract and exploit natural resources. Furthermore, as I passed through places of strong MSC presence, in archipelagos full of cultural and linguistic expressions and challenges, diversity of colors and flavors, right through to the big metropolises, all this confirmed for me that there are plenty of reasons to be hopeful in these 170 years.



This year, we also celebrated in all MSC Entities the 200th anniversary of our Founder's birth. How could we not celebrate these 170 years after witnessing the presence of so many confrères at the Chevalier Congress held in Aparecida, Brazil? It was an event that made the vigor of MSC life and the Chevalier Family tangible.

I have personally witnessed a new organizational awakening in Papua New Guinea, our first mission, within its provincial structures and mission work. We also received news of the progress in the process towards the canonization of Peter To Rot.

The members of the General Team have also been able to hear the reality of our confrères in many parts of the world. For example, the United States Province is a multicultural, vibrant province, which has to address the missionary imperative of rethinking and reconfiguring itself in order to face a new and less certain future.

How inspiring is our presence in Japan. While the Church has small numbers of parishioners, and in a country not known for demonstrative expressions of love, the people know they are loved because of the faithful dedication of our confrères. One older man told an MSC that he knew the MSC loved them because even though only a few people came to Sunday Mass, the MSC continued to turn up and be there for them.

More reasons to celebrate these 170 years with enthusiasm:

- ♥ The implementation of two MSC facilitators' programs in English in Rome and in Spanish/Portuguese in Brazil.
- ♥ The International Meeting of the Laity of the Chevalier Family in the Philippines.
- ♥ The continuity one confrère is giving to the Centre for the Poor-CEPAGCO in the Philippines, as its director has begun to promote JPIC at the Congregational level.
- ♥ The ministry of one MSC Brother in Vietnam who works as a chef in a boarding school where 700 meals are prepared three times a day. There, in the midst of pots and pans, the MSC Spirit vibrates.
- ♥ The birth of the new MSC Province of India, just 170 years after our foundation and its upcoming missionary project in Ireland and France.
- ♥ The second newest Province, the Pacific Islands Province, will soon be opening a community in New Zealand and another in France.
- ♥ The presence of the Francophone African Union in France and in the Brussels City Centre where two Congolese MSC and an 84-year-old Belgian are staying at the 'foot of those excluded from the system'.
- ♥ This energy is also evident through the courage of the MSC entities in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Italy as they dream of an MSC Union of Europe, even with the aging challenges. Our delegate for this project is taking steps through listening to each member and the leaders of these places, which gives us plenty of reasons to celebrate these 170 years of missionary life.
- ♥ Five retreats will be held in the Australian Province, supported by a member of the General Team, to deepen their awareness of being Gifted and Blessed as MSC.



- ♥ There is new energy in the General Administration infused by young and renewed members, together with the dedication of the Communications, Safeguarding, Finance, Ongoing Formation, and JPIC Commissions, enabling us to better serve the Congregation.
- ♥ Further times of celebration include the 100 years of MSC presence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the new formation community in Kenya, the courage of the Spanish Province in ‘letting go’ of two historic MSC works so that they can ‘let come’ a new reality with hope, and the two international Communities in Issoudun, France and Kiel a suburb of Antwerpen, Belgium.
- ♥ The processes of reconfiguration and transformation being undertaken by the MSC Territorial organizations—CAMSC, APIA, and PEC—and the ongoing project to establish AFMSC in Africa, fill us with energy and dynamism, providing us with reasons to celebrate this anniversary.

There is an endless list of reasons to celebrate. Intentionally, I have avoided mentioning names to ensure no one is left out. There is an abundance of experiences and MSC presences where each of you is living out your dedication in silence so that wherever an MSC is present, the entirety of our congregational and charismatic identity is also present. This is a profound reason to celebrate these 170 years of our foundation.

It is life that we celebrate, and it is the dedication of each one of you, dear confrères, that has made it possible to reach this 170th anniversary. You, along with those who came before us—even our martyrs—are the ‘patrimony’ of the congregation. For this reason, we trust that, under the protection of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, inspired by the Church’s call to synodality, and motivated by the Jubilee of 2025, we will celebrate alongside the People of God and continue to be, today, ‘Pilgrims of Hope.’

In Corde Iesu,

Mario Abzalón Alvarado Tovar [writ]

Chris Chaplin

Bernard Mongeau

Fransiskus Bram Tulusan

Simon Lumpini

Genie Pejo



GENERAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

"The heart of Christ is "ecstasy", openness, gift and encounter. In that heart, we learn to relate to one another in wholesome and happy ways, and to build up in this world God's kingdom of love and justice. Our hearts, united with the heart of Christ, are capable of working this social miracle."

(Encyclical Dilexit Nos n. 28)

INDIA



Initial Formation in MSC Indian Province: Mysore, Warangal, Bangalore. Following my attendance at the APIA meeting and the MSC India province’s provincial assembly, I visited several formation houses in India. Unfortunately, I could not visit the MSC India Novitiate in Kerala on this occasion. However, I will endeavour to visit Kerala on my next visit. I want to thank all the confreres in India who assisted in making this visit possible.

Hridayalaya Mysore (4-6 Oct). I was in Mysore from 4-6 October. I met with the formandi (19) and the formators (John Peter, Victor Gerald, John Britto, James Robert, Ruben). The primary reflection in the accompaniment with the students was the central identity of MSC as a Religious Congregation. The accompaniment went well, with the formandi increasingly realising their vocation as candidates for Religious Life. In the meeting with the formators, they shared their experience in accompanying the formandi and the experience of working together in a team with fellow formators. They appreciated the Emmaus Document and started to apply it in their formation program. I took this opportunity to encourage them to realise that cooperation between formators is vital. It is one of the infrastructures in the formation house.

Hridaya Jyothi Warangal (7-10 Oct). The Hridaya Jyothi Warangal community consists of 10 community members (8 formandi and 2 formators). Here, I have enough time to do individual and group accompaniment. The formandi feel very at home living in the formation house. There is a positive atmosphere where they support each other, and the formators accompany them well. There are some challenges, such as intellectual and cultural aspects. I appreciated their high desire to go on mission and specifically serve the poor. The formators did their job well (Praveen Kumar and Julius Kumar). They realised that personal accompaniment is essential in formation. Hence, they did their best to be present with the students. Their pastoral experience in the parish enriches their work as formators. The formators suggested that the formation commission of the congregation should regularly facilitate meetings between formators (National and International).



Hridaya Bhavan Bangalore (11-12 Oct). This formation house is in the middle of a densely populated housing estate in Bangalore. There are 12 members of the community (9 formandi and 3 formators). Although not much time was available, I was grateful to have the opportunity to have individual conversations with the formandi and formators (Joshua Gopini, Joseph Chinnabathini, David Muntode). The formandi are aware of their primary vocation as religious and continue to strive to live out the basic principles of religious life in their daily lives. The formators shared their experiences about the blessings and challenges they experienced during the formation period. I was impressed by their openness. The accompaniment ended with a Eucharistic celebration in the afternoon and continued with a social night to celebrate Joshua’s birthday.

Bram Tulusan, MSC



PHILIPPINES

Cor Vitae Formators' Retreat, Philippines, September 8-9.

I travelled to Manila for the purpose of facilitating the retreat for the fourteen members of the Chevalier Family undertaking the Cor Vitae Formation Training. The retreat 8-19 September took place at the Jesuit Retreat Centre (S.J. Novitiate) in Novaliches, on the outskirts of Manila. The retreat of ten days was based on a Spirituality of the Heart and offered an experience of deep encounter and intimacy with Jesus for the retreatants. Participating in this year's formators program was seven MSC, four OLSH, and three MSC Sisters, three from the Pacific Islands, three from Papua New Guinea, four from Indonesia, one from the Philippines, one from China, and two from India. As usual the Cor Vitae Team provided a wonderful training program and loving support. Congratulations to Sr. Cathy Mwangioidi fdnsc and Sr. Cecilia Kim msc, the director and administrators on team. Fr. Ben Alforque msc also a team member has been participating and



supporting the team from the USA, and Fr. Tans Legaspino MSC has been assisting the formators in training with accompaniment and mentoring from his place in the MSC Scholasticate in Manila. In the few days prior to the retreat, I sat in on the presentations of the participants final papers and joined in offering feedback on their work. This provided an opportunity to observe the quality of participant learning at the end of the Cor Vitae training. The program concluded recently and after building strong friendships they have returned to their provinces and ministries. May God bless all your efforts in the formation of new members of the Chevalier Family.

Chris Chaplin, MSC

COR VITAE, CHEVALIER LAY ASSOCIATE, VIETNAM AND INDIA

Cor Vitae. The Cor Vitae Program is one of the portfolios assigned to me as a member of the MSC General Leadership Team. Cor Vitae is the program established by the Tri-Generalate Leadership Team in a meeting held in the Philippines in 2013, attended by the superiors of different entities in Asia-Pacific Islands and Australia. It aims to provide formation courses and other initial and ongoing formation programs emphasising the formation of the Spirituality of the Heart. Last July 6-19, 2024, I was in Manila to visit the team running the nine-month program for formators. I had the chance to talk to



them individually. I also spoke individually with the Execom Members (the Superiors of the three Congregations in Manila). The formation team generally finds meaning and joy in what they do; however, some concerns are raised during in-

ACCOMPANIMENT



dividual consultations, particularly on the program's future, personnel, and finances.

Chevalier Lay Associate. Another portfolio I am assigned is the liaison between the MSC General Leadership Team and the Chevalier Lay Associate. In the last International Council online meeting that I attended, it was made clear to us liaisons to connect with the Chevalier Lay groups in any MSC territorial entities that we will be visiting, to listen to their stories, inspire them, and give them updates with what's going on in the General Administration. My first encounter with the Chevalier Lay group was in the Netherlands last June 2024. Seven of them gathered, sharing their stories and concerns about their group. On my trip to Manila, Philippines, last July, I met with two Chevalier Lay groups, one in Manila and one in Cebu. It allowed me to introduce myself as the liaison between them and the General Administration and listen to their concerns as a lay group. From Manila, I proceeded to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. On July 21, 2024, I spent the whole morning with the fledgling group of Chevalier Lay Associates. Despite the language barrier, they could convey their concerns as a young group, considering the political milieu and the situation of the MSC presence in Vietnam regarding pastoral engagements. During my

trip to Bangalore, India, I also sat down in the meeting of Chevalier Lay Associates on the evening of August 24, 2024. It was again an opportunity for me to introduce myself and listen to their plan of activities.

Reflecting on my initial encounter with the different lay groups in the MSC territorial entities that I have visited, I have seen the following observations: First, the experience of participating in the International Assembly held in Cebu, Philippines, last January this year (2024) has created a positive impact for most of those who were sent as representatives to the said gathering. It has inspired them to discern ways to express and live the Spirituality of the Heart in their respective countries. Some are in the planning stage, but some are already taking concrete actions according to their capability as a group. Second, there still needs to be some clarification among the three distinct groups established by the three Congregations (MSC, FDNSC, and MSC Sisters). Should they retain their identity with the congregation that helped them establish as a lay group? Although the common identity of a one Chevalier Lay Associate is already understood, the close relationship with their original affiliations is understandable and cannot be taken away.

Lastly, there are still grey areas in understanding the role of the Spiritual Companion, the shift of terminology coming from the Spiritual Director, and their difference. There is also the role of MSC Priests in the lay identity, especially in places where the sense of “Clericalism” is relatively strong.

Vietnam MSC Community. Last July 23-29, 2024, I participated in the Community gathering and discernment held in a Retreat House owned by the Salesian Congregation. We observed the process conducted in Vietnamese with Bob Irwin and Thoi Tran of the Australian Province. The discernment was facilitated by Khoi Nguyen, MSC, the chair of the Commission on Initial Formation of the Australian Province, and assisted by Hein Vu, a Vietnamese Diocesan Priest based in Australia. As observers, we were given a daily summary of what transpired during the day. Focus on the following areas given priority: a) Potentials as Community b) Community Life c) Initial Formation d) Vocation e) Ministry/Mission. (Pls. see the report submitted by Hoang Nguyen, MSC)

First Provincial Chapter of the MSC Indian Province. On August 12-31, 2024, I traveled to India for my first visit to the newly erected MSC Province. They are preparing for their first Provincial Chapter, which was scheduled for August 19-23, 2024. I was asked to facilitate the chapter. The main agenda of the chapter was to finalize the Province statutes and approve the following documents: the Formation Handbook, the Finance Handbook, the Policy on Mission and Ministry Handbook, and the Safeguarding Handbook. The documents were approved in principle and are still to be finalized for completion. After the chapter, I also had the chance to visit some formation houses and school communities in the young Province.

Gene Pejo, MSC





JAPAN

Japan Community Retreat & Annual Assembly. From the 15th to the 27th of November, I had the pleasure of returning to Japan. Japan is one of my favourite places, where I am consistently inspired by the dedication of our confrères on mission there. In Japan, love is expressed through dedication.

MSC Japan moved from being a Region of the Australian Province to a Community subject to the Superior General earlier this year. I was appointed the General Leadership Team liaison for such communities in the Congregation. During my visit in January, we started discussing how this change might impact this community. Our members worked diligently on new statutes approved by the Superior General in Council, updating contracts with home provinces, and exploring new ways of being on mission. My recent visit began with a five-day retreat on Spirituality of the Heart held in the retreat house of the RSCJ Sisters at Susono, Shizuoka. From the dining hall window – when the clouds allowed – we were graced with a view of a snow-capped Mt. Fuji, which is only 30 km to the northwest. The retreat included two daily conferences, inviting the retreatants into a deep intimacy with Jesus and allowing him to call us beyond ourselves, understanding that our mission is lived communally and directed by the Spirit. After the retreat, we returned to Nagoya, where the community met for their two-day annual Assembly. Filling the first day were reports from each place of ministry – the joys, challenges, and potentials for the future. The following day was occupied with translating the approved English Statutes into Japanese. We also celebrated the renewal of vows of Br. Babatera MSC from Kiribati (Pacific Islands Province) who is one of the three young MSC doing Japanese studies.

This international community, one Japanese, five Indonesians, two Filipinos, four Australians, one Indian, one Vietnamese, and

one Kiribati, live and minister in and around Nagoya, in the Aichi and Gifu Prefectures, and on the west coast in Fukui and Tsuruga parishes in Fukui Prefecture. MSCs are present in several parishes and oversee two kindergartens. Our Japanese confrère, Fr. Sadami Takayama has a professorship in the Shirayuri University, in Tokyo. The bishop recently asked our men in Fukui to care for the Catholics in Ishikawa Prefecture, who survived the terrible devastation of the 1 January 2024 Noto earthquake and tsunami. Our confrères have risen to this challenge.

Let us continue to pray for the MSC mission in Japan and invite our confrères worldwide to consider going on mission to this land of mystery and dedication.

Chris Chaplin, MSC



Love and fidelity

Consecrated life.



The term ‘fidelity’ comes from the Latin ‘fidelitate’ and means loyalty, firmness, constancy and perseverance in feelings and actions. Fidelity is likened to the property of a scale, which always assumes the same position when it is asked to do so by the same forces. The scales are always faithful unless someone uses tricks or deceit.

It’s no secret that today’s society is more interested in profit and novelty than fidelity to an established order. Stability was seen as a ‘sign of perfection’ in the past. It provided security. The repeated refrain was: ‘It’s always been this way, why change?’ - Innovations were viewed with suspicion and fear. The future offered no great surprises or dangers. Today, veneration of the past is in crisis, especially a past synonymous with authoritarianism and domination. There is a great and constant desire for novelty. Consider the technological revolution and the novelties that emerge every day. We live in a society where everything changes rapidly. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, a post-modern society that is a ‘liquid society’, a serious question arises: why should commitments last?

Today, there are more distractions to ‘fill the human heart’ than ever. However, there is a lot of superficiality and little deepening of vital issues. What is fleeting is valued, and there is no longer time to internalise values and discernment. You’re always starting from scratch. We live under the domination of the temporary and the disposable. Novelty, however, is positive if it doesn’t become life’s absolute.

Consecrated life, despite the dark night, is not doomed to disappear. What has no future is mediocrity, self-indulgence, and a consecrated life lived artificially, far from today’s reality, pretending to return to a surpassed lifestyle. Both conservatism and modern activism can destabilise today’s consecrated life. A simple life, committed to the poor and rooted in biblical spirituality, always attracts new vocations. We know that the question of vocations is directly linked to the quality of our fidelity to consecration.

Consecrated life, including our Congregation, cannot look only at itself but must look at the whole Church and the society in which it is inserted. We cannot centre our gaze on our navel. In this sense, Pope Francis speaks to the Church

A life of prayer keeps fidelity afloat and makes people realise their weaknesses.

in general about the danger of self-referentiality. It must never lose sight of its contemplative dimension or prophetic and missionary spirit.

The person of consecrated life needs to have well-defined convictions, endeavouring to live the vows professed with responsibility and coherence, constantly overcoming every form of consumerism, materialism, individualism, hedonism and authoritarianism. Personal gifts are respected, but without falling into an independent and autonomous life, a trend in today's world.

Consecrated life evangelises without ceasing to be continually evangelised itself, without losing sight of deepening and creativity. The future of consecrated life lies in its fidelity to the Gospel and its mission to the poor of its time. Due to the type of culture and society in which we live today, all of us, especially young people, find it more challenging to make a decision that commits their whole lives. Many live in an internal situation of anxiety, uncertainty and fear about the future. They experience the effect and cause simultaneously, which is why the maturing process is slower. It's true that young people, in today's reality, have much more information about everything that happens in the world, but they still need to acquire maturity.

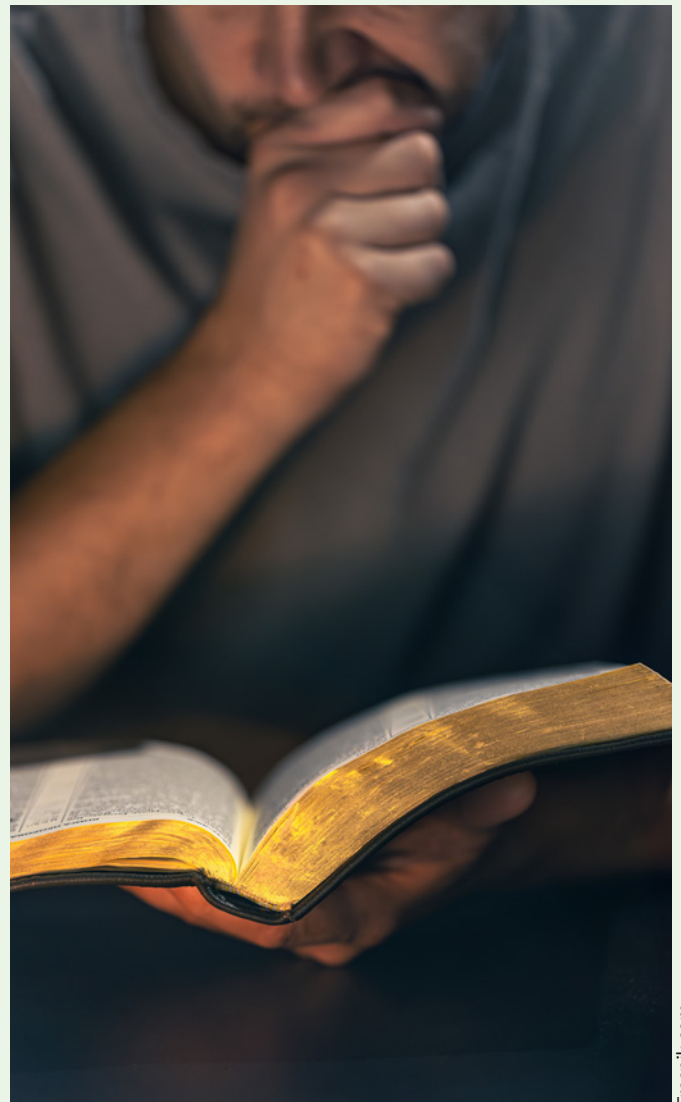
Vows as formulas and ideas express and concretise a faithful commitment to 'Someone'. Fidelity is aimed first and foremost at the person and not the institution. However, the Institution is the support where the person will fulfil their commitments. The vows are not cold precepts but a way of living a better relationship with God and the community. To love means to commit oneself faithfully in favour of 'Someone'. Love is the starting point of all human fidelity. The one who loves remains faithful. Faithfulness, in turn, is the proof and expression of love. God, as Sacred Scripture reminds us, is always faithful. It is he who gives us the grace and the possibility to be faithful. The Church lives out her fidelity to God in every consecrated person. Faithfulness transcends the individual because it involves other members of the community. It is in the Church that a person incarnates their fidelity to Christ in their surrender to God the Father.

The easy transition from one political party to another, from one marital relationship to another, from one religious practice to another... all this is seen as 'normal' in a culture that quickly burns out life experiences. Today, more than ever, we need to recover the concept of fidelity. It's about saving love in its integrity. How poor and small is love that is not faithful! It is a love without history or roots. There is no faithful love without the test of time, without the seasons, without the ripening of fruit. Can there be love without history? Love is eternal because fidelity is eternal. The decision to love is not made once and for all. It needs to be continually renewed. Just like love, fidelity needs new sap every day. Faithfulness brings peace to our souls, reassures our conscience and strengthens our hearts. It brings joy. It's important always to ask yourself:

What are the affections, thoughts, omissions, and attitudes that make me go down the road of infidelity?

On the road to fidelity, it's crucial that the person is open to reviewing their life and to conversion. Spiritual tradition speaks of a 'second conversion'. A life of prayer keeps fidelity afloat and makes people realise their weaknesses. A great help to fidelity comes from the community, which is the place where consecrated life is realised. Being faithful is not a finished and realised value but a journey to be taken up again every day. We have to realise that the challenge of fidelity is the challenge of time. The path of fidelity does not progress in leaps and bounds but requires an asceticism that involves accepting one's limits and weaknesses. You must bear in mind your age and education, as well as your capacity to love and give of yourself. A 'yes' pronounced the first time must be repeated every day and updated over time. Love that is faithful tends to blossom in eternity. It transcends time and space. For those who are faithful, even at death, love remains forever because it is eternal...

Benedito Angelo Cortez, MSC



The new responses of Religious Life in a time of change

Witness and significance at the limit.

At the limits of the new forms of religion, Religious Life appears as a joyful and joyful witness of resilience, turning the following of Jesus into a way of life at the service of the Kingdom of God, accustomed to emerging as a dynamic response to the signs of the times, to the rhythm of the Holy Spirit with its multiple and pluriform charismatic accent. From the contemplative monasteries that diligently accompany the processes of a church that is not sheltered in community bubbles but that places itself on the way out, in the vanguard, on the frontier, there where the lines of most incredible pain and suffering are being written at this moment, like birth pangs that illuminate a future full of hope, not only for the economic possibilities of the first worlds that lie behind them but also for the humanity that rests in pluri, multi- and intercultural relations.

On the margins of a planet in a crisis of humanity due to constant suicides, genocides and ethnocides, the planet and the universe are subjected to continuous ecocides and constant attacks against reason (epistemicide) or God himself, as a supreme maker with the determining theocides, in all cases, the presence of Religious Life is as significant as the life of the first Monks of the Desert, the dark night of St. John of the Cross or the martyrial dimension of so many consecrated men and women in Latin America.

To feel, to think, to act within those limits where the commitment with the poor, with the last, with the most vulnerable, marginalised and excluded is a crime, where it accompanies processes, running the same risks as those who are at risk in the capitalist system, to the point of becoming one in their efforts for the liberation and transformation of reality, contributing with peoples, nations and even with planetary initiatives, to the point of becoming one in their efforts

...as a joyful and joyful witness of resilience, turning the following of Jesus into a way of life.



for the liberation and transformation of reality, contributing with peoples, nations and even with planetary initiatives, in that which draws a new map of solidarity and hope, converting the humiliations and humiliations of the significant impoverished majorities into greater dignity and respect for the person, the demagogic abuses of power and corruption into a greater justice and equality that even makes itself felt in the social, civil and criminal courts and tribunals. It is the experience of following Jesus Christ in his revelation and permanent manifestation in the little ones that remain, both yesterday and today, that challenges the ancient and so rightly renewed religious orders as well as the more modern religious institutes, congregations, societies of apostolic life and secular institutes, virgins and consecrated lay men and women who enter and insert themselves where life cries out.

Sign and presence of what remains and endures in time, the living Gospel and the power of the incarnation of the Word, the community revitalises the evangelical counsels, bringing together the new paradigms of compassion and mercy, and helps to lift the anchors of comfort, indifference, selfishness and individualism, uninhibited from its fraternal constitutionality the possibilities of an authentic encounter with the human, Christian and religious meaning of life. Synodality, communion, participation and mission are not only the hype of a day of ecclesial euphoria but the centrality of a group or groups that interact from the love of God in the ideal of a new and more authentic humanity.

Julio César Molina Martínez, MSC

Reflection of *Dilexit Nos*

“The Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Christ.”

On Oct 24th 2024, Pope Francis issued a new Encyclical, *Dilexit Nos* on “The Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Christ.”

The Underlying Vision. In the opening pages, Francis refers to the liquid society of our time in which people have become decentred not merely from God and their faith but also themselves and from one another, leaving us with a world that often feels superficial, fragmented, heartless, and blind to the gift of God’s love for us.

Almost 80% of this encyclical is about revisiting the tradition of the Sacred Heart as outlined in Scripture and Church tradition, with a more specific focus on the developments of the 1800s from the time of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque onwards. We MSCs are already well acquainted with this material thanks to the inspiring writings of colleagues like Jon Bovenamers, Eugene Cuskelly, and Hans Kwakmann. Scripture is quoted at great length throughout the document – from both the Old and New Testaments – emphasising literal interpretation. This is in keeping with an understanding of the Sacred Heart as predominantly about devotion and consolation. Obviously, for the millions suffering from poverty, violence, exploitation, and discrimination around the world, this is a reassuring and comforting mes-

sage. Indeed, without this kind of devotion, millions would succumb to anomie and absolute despair.

However, a serious theological issue is not addressed in this encyclical. The devotion in itself, so important for sheer survival and some semblance of meaning in life, does little or nothing to change the plight of such people, nor does it in any way address the systemic and structural issues that oppress and marginalise people in the first place. Paradoxically, it can reinforce the corrosive elements of the “liquid society” referenced by Pope Francis in so far as it encourages a kind of childlike co-dependency bereft of the critical wisdom of a more adult sense of faith.

Contemporary theologians highlight the need to “rework the tradition” and not merely restate it. Through this more discerning approach, we honour a tradition’s inherited vitality while being open to the “reworking” desired by the Spirit for the ever-new situations confronting our faith today. That call to rework the tradition is missing in *Dilexit Nos*.

At no stage does this encyclical distinguish between the devotion of consolation (with comfort and consolation as the keywords) and the spirituality of liberation (primarily focused on Gospel liberation and mutual empowerment). The danger here is that devotionism can undermine theological discernment. One can argue that both dimensions have a basis in scripture and, to a lesser degree, in the tradition of the church, but theologically, the spirituality of liberation is more foundational to the empowering and transformative vision of the New Reign of God (the Kingdom).

The MSC Context. Back in the 1970s, I recall Fr Eugene Cuskelly introducing us to the distinction between the Devotion and the Spirituality of the Heart and inviting us to embrace the latter in accordance with the updating of our MSC charism recommended by Vatican Two. Some of us got the message, others were confused, and others still could not figure



Bruce Woods. Chevalier College. Australia

out the distinction between the two approaches. For Cuskelly, the important point was that we start with God's unconditional love for us and move on to discerning how we, too, are called to love unconditionally.

I am fascinated with the fact that *Dilexit Nos* begins with that very same claim (No.1), even to the point of citing 1 Jn 4:16: "We have come to know and believe in the love that God has for us." But rarely in the document does Francis return to that key point (cf. Nos 35, 48ff). The devotion takes over, and the emphasis shifts to a rather narrow personal understanding of discipleship, Church-centred rather than world-focused. Comfort and consolation take priority – even the suggestion that we should comfort Jesus in his suffering (because of our sins) - Francis' attempt at updating the notion of reparation.

Beyond the focus on human persons are the systemic and structural issues so central to Francis's other encyclicals, particularly *Laudato Si* (2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). Not a single reference to either document in this encyclical till the very last section (Nos 217ff), and here we encounter what



seems to be an after-thought, with a single reference to each document, inserted into No.217.

For us, MSCs, invited to discern the deeper meaning of our charism amid the cultural and theological challenges of the 21st century, *Dilexit Nos* does not have a great deal to offer. For those among us serving the poor and marginalized of our world, we too can draw comfort and consolation from this encyclical. But, in fact, there is relatively little new material here beyond what is already in our own inherited MSC tradition on this approach.

For those among us, seeking to discern the deeper and broader challenges of the Spirituality of the Heart, the other encyclicals, *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* have a great deal more to guide and inspire us. Called to address the heartlessness of our time, the injustice and oppression of people – and our Earth – our charism still has a significant relevance, and a deep biblical congruence, for addressing the urgent issues facing humanity today.

The formidable challenges that face us are complex, and can no longer be addressed from within a kind of ecclesiastical isolation (or sense of superiority). Collaboration is essential as a way forward, inviting us to discern and engage people of every creed and none – who exhibit the love, compassion, and resilience of the heart. Every day we witness such people giving generous service – even at the price of their lives – amid the heartless situations of our contemporary world. For the future we need to make those people our partners in mission. We want them to know that they are validated and affirmed, as co-partners with whom we seek "to build a new civilization of love." (No.182). Without them the New Reign of God will not come to its fuller realization.

Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC

I recall Fr Eugene Cuskelly introducing us to the distinction between the Devotion and the Spirituality of the Heart and inviting us to embrace the latter in accordance with the updating of our MSC charism recommended by Vatican Two.

To be on earth, the Heart of God

A reflection on life transformed as an MSC religious.

In my late 40s, my life significantly changed following a tragic death and a miracle birth in my family. I describe these events as my epiphany! I have been in corporate finance for over thirty years, working for the same company in Canada, England, and Australia. During my time in Canada, I joined the Catholic communion in Vancouver. However, in my youth as an evangelical Anglican, I contemplated ministry, but my parish minister thought it was a passing phase. This 'phase' would come and go over the ensuing decades.

In the early 1970s, I discovered the MSC via the Annals, which included a promotion for vocations. I noted their multi-apostolate engagement. I applied and was accepted, but at the time, I chose not to proceed. Fast-forward to 1993 and my 'epiphany', I approached the MSC again and was accepted into the novitiate in 1994 following a year of discernment. Whilst I was aware the MSC was a mixed order of priests and brothers, there was only one thing on the radar for me: ordained ministry! My initial formation at a mature age was challenging for me and my formators. However, I persevered, made my first vows in 1997, and proceeded to the scholasticate.

I discovered I thrived on the intellectual stimulus of academia, which was entirely new for me. However, my pastoral placements throughout those years would significantly impact me more. I had never been exposed to homelessness, HIV/AIDS, or transsexuals in my life before joining the MSC. However, a six-month placement at the Sacred Heart Hospice in Sydney had the most significant impact. When it concluded, I said to my formators, 'I have to nurse', to which they responded, 'Well, do it!'. The formation team agreed that I would pro-

ceed to ordination and then obtain a degree in nursing and combine both as per the French model of the 'worker/priest' of the early 1950s.

In 2001, I graduated with a Bachelor of Theology, a university medal and a scholarship for academic excellence. The year that followed is one I would rather forget, but in hindsight, as events unfolded, I now perceive them as the 'finger of the Lord'; it seems God had a different plan for me! Through a rather intense period of discernment, I chose to remain a lay-consecrated MSC (brother) and proceeded to study nursing. I moved to Canberra, became part of our MSC Daramalan College community, and undertook nearly four years of further study at the University of Canberra. When I graduated, I nursed with Calvary Health Care (Little Company of Mary) across multiple disciplines, specialising in palliative care and gerontology. The years that ensued in this ministry were both life-giving and transformative. While I have been retired from full-time nursing for several years, I continue volunteering with Calvary in Sydney. I spend time with people with terminal illnesses, recording their life stories for publication. I also continue to nurse and coordinate the medical care of the men in our communities.

Whilst the past almost thirty years have had their ups and downs, I will forever be thankful to the MSC for the opportunities and support afforded me. In my thesis (nursing), I articulated my nursing philosophy as moving beyond the biomedical paradigm of doing to and for and 'being with'. Our MSC heart spirituality informed these sentiments since it comes down to 'presence' for me. Some years ago, our Indonesian brothers invited me as a guest speaker at their tri-annual gathering. I emphasised that our role and identity were not so much tied to what we 'do' but more about our way of 'being', our way of being 'present' to one another and in this world ... to be on earth the Heart of God!



Let me digress and expound on my lived experience of our 'heart spirituality'. While studying nursing, I was granted a scholarship in 2004 to spend a semester at Khon Kaen University in Thailand. Khon Kaen is not on the tourist map and is in the northern rural province of Esan near the Laos/Cambodian border. My brief was to pursue a project researching the quality-of-life issues for men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS. I travelled the province with a Catholic sister who visited and supported these people. The experience was life-changing, and I felt privileged to be allowed into their lives. I recall one woman telling me, 'My virus is my friend. If I am not a friend of my virus, it will kill me.' However, another more profound experience was whilst on sabbatical in Jerusalem in 2012. I was based at Tantur on the West Bank adjacent to that ghastly wall and security checkpoint encircling Bethlehem. Whenever I travelled into the Old City in Jerusalem, I would take the 'Arab' bus (as opposed to the modern air-conditioned illegal Jewish settler bus), which I would board at the checkpoint. During my three months there, I befriended a refugee family of three generations living in Bethlehem. One day, travelling with them into the Old City, the IOF stopped our bus, and this entire family was dragged from the bus by security forces and interrogated. The look and feeling of terror are forever ingrained in me. This was just one of many such experiences where I experienced first-hand the terror Palestinians face daily from their Zionist oppressors, igniting my rising sense of injustice perpetrated with impunity. I crave creative and intellectual stimulation. I always have, and as I look forward, I continue my search for 'finding God in all things'. So, at 78 years of age and preparing for a sabbatical in Ireland with the Dominicans at An Tairseach, I've immersed myself in reading Berry, Swimme, Teilhard de Chardin, O'Murchu (MSC) and Rohr. I feel I'm up to my neck in cosmology, ecology, contemporary theology and spirituality. Where once I thought I might be deemed a heretic, I now find I am not alone in my thoughts and have been affirmed, thanks to a chance meeting with Timothy Radcliffe, OP, earlier this year!

At the end of 2023, I was appointed to St Mary's Towers, our spiritual base in a rural setting, just over an hour's drive southwest of Sydney. One of the reasons for my appointment was to sit on the redevelopment committee, and whilst it may not happen, I envisage, in the context of *Laudato Si'*, the possible establishment of an organic farm and ecology centre. Thus, the past year has opened so many more possibilities to exercise my imagination for our mission that I only regret that I am not ten years younger to see some of my ideas and plans come to fruition. I await to see what my An Tairseach sabbatical experience will reveal! My role and identity as a religious brother, as an MSC brother, has been and continues to be a grace-filled vocational alternative to ordained ministry. When we consider the word 'vocation', we also need to look at its Latin root 'vocare', loosely defined as 'inner voice', from which we derive the expression 'a calling'. One of my best experiences in nursing was precepting undergraduates from university on a clinical placement. I could have two equally competent undergrads, but one might have a Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 mentality, and that person, I would say, had



a 'job'. The other equally competent placement knew instinctively how to 'be' with a patient, and that candidate I described as having the 'vocation'.

As time passed and I celebrated my silver jubilee, I reflected on my vocation as an MSC religious in the context of vowed religious life. Not once have I regretted not pursuing ordained ministry. Being an MSC religious is my vocation, whereas ordained ministry was not. Our post-Vatican II Church has rethought the relationship between religious life and ordained ministry. The two are separate but compatible charisms in the Church. Religious life is not essential to ordained ministry; ordained ministry is not crucial to religious life. Religious life, as described by Vatican II, is "a form of life to which some Christians, both clerical and lay, are 'called' by God so that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and may contribute, each in their way, to the mission of the Church." (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, paragraph 43)

At 78, I know on paper I am, as the statisticians describe my age group as 'old-old'! That's a number on paper, but I don't feel 'old', and I know God has not finished with me yet! **John Walker, MSC**

A path of conversion

MSC Religious life.

Every year on 2 February, the Church celebrates the Day of Consecrated Life to pay tribute to those who have decided to dedicate their lives to God. Religious life is an integral part of the Church. It is characterised by commitments, public vows. In it, the place of prayer remains essential to live our vows well. Religious life is always at the service of God, being at the service of others. “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11,20-26). The Eucharist we celebrate daily reminds us that the only power that Jesus Christ exercised as king is the strength of saving love, of the one who gives himself for the good of others. For the love of God and his people, religious life requires giving all one’s being to Christ and his Church. Religious life is based on the Gospel, the very life of Christ. To choose religious life is to want to live like Christ, to be in his wake. As the Second Vatican Council has pointed out: “Indeed, through Baptism, a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles, which might draw him away from the fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. By his profession of the evangelical counsels, then, he is more intimately consecrated to divine service” (Lumen Gentium, 44).

“Hence it follows that the profession of the evangelical vows is a super-addition to that consecration which is proper to Baptism. It is indeed a special consecration which perfects the former one, inasmuch as by it, the follower of Christ totally commits and dedicates himself to God, thereby making his entire life a service to God alone” [Message of Pope Paul VI to the General Chapters or Religious Orders and Congregations, 23 May 1964]

Vows are commitments made in public. To maintain a closer relationship with Christ, we adapt our lives by following his exam-



ple. His life was characterised by many characteristics, but three of them were essential:

- In all circumstances, Jesus submitted to his Heavenly Father: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work” (Jn 4,34)
- He lived the chastity of a single person and spoke of celibacy: “some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 19,12).
- He lived without anything: “For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8,9).

As MSC, we make three vows: obedience, chastity and poverty. We commit ourselves to imitating Jesus in this way throughout our lives.

Obedience. Obedience is given priority among the evangelical counsels. It is lived in fraternal charity. By obedience, “we bind ourselves to live and act always within that communion and to practice obedience in mutual charity” (CS 42). Chevalier wrote in 1869: “Those who enter our Society can readily accept that others may surpass them in learning, in mortification, in poverty; but they will not allow themselves to be outdone in obedience and mutual charity.” According to our constitutions, “by professing obedience, we commit ourselves to seek and accept the will of God in the life and mission of the Society” (CS 41).

If we think about it, obedience is a gift of love from ourselves to God, and we entrust ourselves to him through the Congregation and our legitimate superiors. By giving ourselves totally, we conform to the word of Jesus, who said: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work” (Jn 4,34). As baptised children of God, we are free to give ourselves like this and to make a vow of obedience, which is a testimony of our freedom. This belonging to mutual obedience is marked by a tension between two characteristics: a gift of oneself without reserve to the Congregation and a search for consensus based on mutual respect (CS 58 S). To preach the freedom of Christ, it is indispensable to have both, for this is the freedom that the world seeks. Consequently, obedience practised in charity favours voluntary service rather than servile submission.

“In professing obedience, religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God’s salvific will. After the example of Jesus Christ, who came to do the will of the Father (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 39:9) and “assuming the nature of a slave” (Phil. 2:7) learned obedience in the school of suffering (cf. Heb. 5:8), religious under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God. Under their guidance, they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself, in obedience to the Father, served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many (cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:14-18). So they are closely bound to the service of the Church and strive to attain the measure of the full manhood of Christ (Eph. 4:13)” (Perfectae Caritatis, 14).



By the vow of obedience, we make decisions in accordance with the will of God, which is often mediated for them by the authority of our congregation.

Chastity. Chastity « for the sake of the kingdom of heaven » (Mt 19,12), which we profess, must be regarded as a distinguished gift of grace. Chastity is living with an undivided heart. Chastity testifies to a deep love, which is friendship, and as consecrated men, we show the only mystery of love differently, and thus, we witness to God who is love. Hence, the first sin against chastity is failure to love because chastity is always based on love; it can never be based on fear of our sexuality or our corporeality or others. As Saint John says: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love” (1 Jn 4,18). This self-giving to God and the neighbour is not easy. It requires fraternal support. That is why we say at mass in the I confess to God, “I ask [...] you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God. » We must not rely on our strength, but on God, through penance, mortification, and fraternal loving support. As consecrated men, can we say that we find joy, happiness, friendship, laughter, spontaneity, and a way of loving that is extraordinary in our religious life?

“The chastity “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12), which religious profess should be counted as an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35) so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men. Thus, it not only symbolises the heavenly goods but also the most suitable means by which religious dedicate themselves with undivided hearts to the service of God and the works of the apostolate. In this way, they recall to the minds of all the faithful that wondrous marriage decreed by God and which is to be fully revealed in the future age in which the Church takes Christ as its only spouse” (Perfectae Caritatis, 12).

By the vow of chastity, MSCs give themselves to God in love so fully that the pursuit of union with God is the driving force of their lives. Our hearts are free to love God above all else and to love all people for the sake of God. Celibacy is adopted not because ma-

riage is not desired but because union with God and the work of God are more greatly desired.

“All men should note that the profession of the evangelical counsels, though entailing the renunciation of certain values which are to be undoubtedly esteemed, does not detract from a genuine development of the human persons, but rather by its very nature is most beneficial to that development. Indeed, the counsels, voluntarily undertaken according to each one’s personal vocation, contribute a great deal to the purification of the heart and spiritual liberty. They continually stir up the fervour of charity. But especially, they can more fully mould the Christian man to that type of chaste and detached life, which Christ the Lord chose for Himself and which His Mother also embraced. This is clearly proven by the example of so many holy founders. Let no one think that religious have become strangers to their fellowmen or useless citizens of this earthly city by their consecration. For even though it sometimes happens that religious do not directly mingle with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and spiritually cooperate with them. In this way the building up of the earthly city may have its foundation in the Lord and may tend toward Him, lest perhaps those who build this city shall have labored in vain” (Lumen Gentium, 46).

Poverty. Poverty is more culturally determined than the other two vows. By our profession, we promise to God that we do not possess anything by right of personal property but keep all things in common and use them under the direction of superiors for the common good of the Congregation. Following the apostles’ example, we “distributed to each according to need” [Acts 4,35] and the common good. Our voluntary poverty is not a deprivation as such, although it implies a certain solidarity with the poor of the world, and we are called to live frugal and simple lives in order to be able to put our treasure in the kingdom of the justice of God, and trust in His providence. Poverty gives us the freedom to be called at any moment so that everywhere the love of God is manifested. We cannot be missionaries if we have to carry all our furniture and personal belongings every time we go

on mission. “As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ [...] Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick” [Mt 10,7-10].

“Religious should diligently practice and if need be express also in new forms that voluntary poverty which is recognised and highly esteemed especially today as an expression of the following of Christ. By it, they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Matt. 8:20). With regard to religious poverty, it is not enough to use goods in a way subject to the superior’s will, but members must be poor both in fact and in spirit, their treasures being in heaven (Matt. 8:20)” (Perfectae Caritas, 13).

By the vow of poverty, we possess everything in common, share our goods and are invited to live simply, both personally and communally, taking into account the circumstances of time and place (CS 50). That each of us, in his task, may feel bound to the common law of labour and while thus procuring for himself the necessary for our maintenance and works, reject any excessive concern and entrust himself to the providence of the Father of heaven (Matt. 6,25).

When we profess our vow of poverty publicly, we accept to live in the discomfort of the gospel. Living this discomfort is a way of being prophetic in a society that values having it at the expense of being, property and self-sufficiency. Our vow of poverty makes us free in regard to goods. It is not a question of deprivation, but rather of the relationship we have with food, money, comfort, material things, even our own will.

Our vow of poverty is a form of abandonment to God, a way of recognising that everything comes from Him. This is what our constitutions say in number 48: “Jesus lived in total dependence on his Father, putting himself completely into his hands. He calls us to live in the same way in union with him by choosing evangelical poverty in answer to his call.” How can we be close to the poor and excluded, working in the field of justice, peace and integration of creation if we are not detached from created things? How to live differently our solidarity with the poor and the little ones? This vow calls us to be accountable and responsible. “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need” (Acts 2,44). And “there was no needy person among them” (Acts 4,34). The well-being of our members, our works and our missions is only sustainable if we all contribute to the common fund.

Chevalier wrote in 1855: “Gentleness, humility, obedience, a spirit of poverty, of zeal, of sacrifice, of devotedness will be their lot.” “The one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does” (James 1,25).

May we show the world our happiness in fulfilling our vows as consecrated men following Jules Chevalier’s footsteps. May we exercise the only power we have, the strength of a saving love, of one who gives himself for the good of others. Let us do this in memory of Christ, who gave his life to save the world.

Lord, you who exercise the unique power of love as a gift of life help our community to love. Amen!

Bernard Mongeau, MSC

‘Ut in ipso vivas, et regnes in perpetuum’

“That you may live and reign in him forever and ever”.

‘Ut in ipso vivas, et regnes in perpetuum’ (‘that you may live and reign in him forever and ever’), thus ends the hymn proper to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart called Ave Admirabile, through which the religious consecrate themselves daily to the Sacred Heart. In the light of the latest encyclical published by Pope Francis, entitled Dilexit nos (Rom 8:37), i.e. ‘he loved us’, we realise how the charism and spirituality given to Father Jules Chevalier (1824-1907), for the good of the Church and all humanity, is current and necessary today. Starting from this excerpt from Ave Admirabile, which echoes and deepens the request of the Our Father prayer, that is, ‘Your Kingdom come’, we find a similarity and a rapprochement with number 182 of the aforementioned encyclical, since the Holy Father writes, quoting Saint John Paul II, of the need to build a civilisation of love, which in reality



is the Kingdom of the Heart of Christ. In this way, when we ask that the Heart of Jesus live and reign in our hearts, we express our desire to be guided by the sentiments of that Heart (cf. Phil 2:5) so that his Kingdom may come and fertilise humanity.

Also, in number 166, starting from the experiences and writings of St Margaret Mary, we find another approach. Francis signs that 'Jesus speaks of his thirst to be loved'. The motto of the congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart is 'May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere'. This is neither a coincidence nor a significant discovery since St Margaret's writings influenced Fr. Chevalier. Therefore, in the apostolate, through witness and preaching, the members of this congregation (and all those who live this charism and spirituality, in other words, the members of the Chevalier Family) are called to make this Heart known and loved, starting from the certainty that 'He first loved us' (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). From an intimate and profound experience with the Love of God, Fr. Jules Chevalier realised that the Sacred Heart was a remedy for the ills that afflicted the people of his time (MSC Const., 3). We can intuit that Jules Chevalier was a man who had his eyes fixed on the Lord and his Adorable Heart but who was also attentive and sensitive to the people and situations around him. In this sense, he is an example for us that 'looking to the Lord, who "took our infirmities and carried our sorrows", helps us to pay more attention to the suffering and needs of others' (DILEXIT NOS, 171).

Returning to the theme of the Kingdom, the Constitutions of the MSC state that the mission of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart is to work for the advent of the Kingdom of God (cf. Const, MSC, 27), in a combination of living the Spirituality of the Heart and commitment to our brothers and sisters, especially the marginalised and forgotten. The Constitutions of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart state that 'in the poor and the little ones, in all the victims of injustice and violence, we will discover the face of Christ' (Const. MSC, 22). Francis, for his part, teaches that Jesus 'changed the face of the world by giving life to institutions dedicated to caring for those in inhumane conditions: abandoned newborns, orphans, the elderly left alone, the mentally ill, those with incurable diseases or serious malformations, the homeless' (DILEXIT NOS, 170).

For Fr Jules Chevalier, the figure of Mary was extremely important and necessary because of her role as intercessor, in the light of Jn 2:1-5 (Wedding at Cana). In this way, it's interesting to touch on the Marian theme in Spirituality of the Heart and note a possible rapprochement with the new encyclical, since in *Dilexit nos* Francis states that 'in the Church, the mediation of Mary, intercessor and mother, can only be understood as participation in this one source, which is the mediation of Christ himself' (DILEXIT NOS, 176). From the outset, Fr Jules Chevalier wanted to honour and venerate Mary in a special way, so, under the impulse of the Spirit, he invoked Mary as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, recognising that 'Mary is intimately united to the mystery of the

Heart of her Son' (Const. MSC, 18). For the representation of the image, Jules Chevalier felt that it was necessary for the mother to be with the Son and for the Son to 'show his Heart with one hand and point to his Mother with the other' (cf. CHEVALIER). Mary's relationship with the Heart of her Son is a profound and intimate one, because 'she knew the unfathomable riches of Christ, she was filled with his love; she leads us to him by pointing to his Heart, the source of a boundless love that gives birth to a new world' (MSC Const., 18). Mary leads everyone to the fountain that springs from the Heart of Jesus.

Finally, the beauty of the new encyclical, its spiritual value, is an invitation to all Christians to unite themselves to the Heart of Jesus, seeking to have the same feelings and thoughts that dwell in this Sacred Heart. For us, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and members of the Chevalier Family, it is an impetus to continue living this charism and spirituality faithfully in the Church and in the world, proclaiming God's love and mercy, calling for the coming of the Kingdom, knowing how to discern the signs of the times and the seeds planted by the Spirit in different situations and realities.

Leonardo Henrique Agostinho, MSC



Who are ... who are ... who are we?

When we were students at Chevalier College, Bowral – many years ago now – we used to barrack loudly and vigorously for our First XV Rugby team using our ‘war cry’:

‘Who are we, who are we, who are we
We are the boys of SHC.
C-H-E-V-A-L-I-E-R
Chevalier!!!’

Of course, this written expression of our long-ago full-throated gusto cannot do justice to our vocal, loyal enthusiasm of those days.

Should we have been asked at the time, no doubt we would have been hard-pressed to put into eloquent prose what chanting a war cry meant to us as students at OUR college, but you should have heard us!! It wasn’t simply putting on a uniform; that illustrated what we were, where we went to school. What stirred us came from within, a sense of pride, of loyalty; this was who and why we wanted to be sons of Chevalier.

Perhaps it is similar for us as MSC, we sons of Chevalier! We spoke of ourselves as being an MSC – we, too, had our uniform, our rule and way of life, and places to live and work. But this is not the same as being MSC. The former explains what we do, where, and how; the latter expresses who we are and why. And though being an MSC may have changed considerably over time and will undoubtedly be different in the future, being MSC is and will be unchanged. This is what counts, and reflection on this is where, I believe, our future lies.

As MSC, we too have our ‘war cry’: may the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere known and loved forever, which is meaningful and precious for us; we know what it means and why it is so significant. This is because it expresses for us who and why we are MSC – wherever we are in whatever form of ministry our ministry takes. This applies equally to our youngest and oldest member, most senior professed and the junior among us.

But can we elaborate on this, what we call our charisma, in 2024 and looking forward to the future, in – well – any sort of prose? Along with others I have been invited to try and do just that. My approach is to pose some questions and, well, raise other questions... as they say, why do you always answer a question with a question? Well, why not!

- What does it mean, for me, to be a Missionary of the Sacred Heart today and going forward;
- (how) does (my) being MSC make a difference to anyone;



- (what) does being MSC add to, contribute to, the building of the community of God’s people, to making God’s reign a reality in my life and in my world:
- Would anyone notice if (I) we weren’t around?

These are serious and challenging questions to pose, especially to one of an ageing group diminishing in numbers, a group that has (and is) making a significant contribution in many fields of ministry, and a group (I believe) that still has a real future through the well-educated, keenly enthusiastic, pastorally efficient younger members of our group. But does this optimism (rather than confidence) stem from living in and from the past, wishful thinking, clutching at straws, or heaven forbid, making real the cliché relating to rearranging the proverbial deckchairs?

So, who am I? Who are we? Are Missionaries of the Sacred Heart relevant going forward in today’s world, today’s Church? Are we needed? Do we have something to offer that is special and therefore worthwhile, and if so, what is it we can contribute so that we make a real difference? I believe we are that we do. But we also need to ‘get our act together’ by trying to identify what it is that makes us ‘special’, then why and how this makes who we are and why we are as MSC significant to our world and Church. I have told this story before, but it bears retelling in this context. You can always pick an MSC! Following mass as a ‘supply priest’ in a parish, someone asked me if I was an MSC? Having assured the questioner that, yes, I was indeed an MSC, I asked why such a question. The response I received came as a surprise (shock!) ... ‘you can always pick an MSC!’ My reaction to this was a tentative ‘is that a good or a bad thing?’ but I received the reassurance ‘that’s very good’. I felt great! Not just for myself but also for the recognition and acceptance of what being an MSC is all about... or better still, what being MSC is all about. And this encounter tells me that we, being MSC, have a future and why.



MSC are recognised for who we are and the special charism we offer. Nothing grand, nothing spectacular, but rather ordinary, really, in a way like – well, Jesus. But Jesus from his very core, offering heartfelt response to each and all, whatever their need. This, of course, our confreres have been doing from the very beginning, and as long as we continue to do so, we have a future. However, not necessarily as, in the past, we thought we might have.

What this episode tells me is that we are not called to fulfil a set role in the Church and in the world but to be a presence. When it comes to the recognition, we are not out to fulfil a definition . . . what being an MSC implies and involves . . . but to be a special type of presence, to have a particular kind of relationship and engagement with people, where images seem more cogent than explanation. Michael Fallon – how long ago was it? – invited us to reflect on verbs rather than nouns when exploring our relationships with God, ourselves and one another: to speak of being faithful rather than faith, of loving rather than love . . . These days, the same approach is taken by Pope Francis, challenging us to reflect similarly.

Being MSC means being compassionate, being caring, being heartfelt, shepherding (and hasn't that become the flavour of the month) . . . being Jesus, or as we MSC like to say, being on earth the Heart of God.

More recently, one of our novice directors challenged his novices that our MSC charism is not to focus on being sons of Chevalier but to model ourselves on the compassionate Heart of Jesus in his engagement with all, but especially with the marginalised, the needy . . . This was not to downplay the role of Jules Chevalier but to highlight that this is what he and we are called to be as MSC.

So, my pondering invites me to focus on being MSC rather than being an MSC because being MSC is how we are called, can contribute, can make a difference. Being MSC provides a helpful framework and support for our specific ways of contributing to mis-

sion and ministry. But is this where we are moving as we age and diminish in numbers? Do we hold on (hang in there!) for as long as possible? Or is time simply running out for such an approach? Please don't misunderstand me! I am not underestimating the importance of our religious congregation and its lifestyle. This has been my foundation, my formation, my functioning milieu. But this is being an MSC. And I am led to wonder whether this is where our emphasis should be moving forward. Is formation for 'religious life' what mission and ministry need to provide the world and the Church with those who want to be MSC?

I remember on our first profession day how the twelve of us had emerged from the Novitiate as 'Butler boys', well prepared for living religious life. This was good, of course, but the formation was more to train us how to be religious than to be MSC; indeed, our sights were set more on being ordained – yes, as MSC priests – than our lifelong commitment to being MSC. Time to take the signs of the time seriously! We cannot expect simply to produce new generations in our own image and likeness. What we need to reflect on is how to ensure the charism is handed on and to whom.

It has always been a source of reassurance that I am not alone; I am one of many, reflecting the image St Paul offers, that there are many parts of a body which need to work together if the body is to be efficient and effective; or perhaps the emphasis Paul gave when reminding us that God offers many gifts – not for our own benefit but for the good of all, and in this finding focus and function.

So, speaking of focus and function, and looking to the future for a 'body' and 'gifts' to provide a comparable reassurance, who will truly be MSC and will it be possible always to 'pick and MSC'? By rights, every Christian can claim the title and role – we are all trying to be followers of Jesus. But in line with Paul's teaching, some are called not to be special but to be His followers in a particular way, to be missionaries, those sent to proclaim the message and offer the ministry of God's love revealed in Jesus, and to step up as Teresa of Avila wrote, to be in our own time and place the hands and voice – and especially heart – of Jesus.

Jules Chevalier saw this clearly, and his vision of missionaries of the Heart of Jesus included not only men who were priests and brothers but also men and women who were religious and lay. Circumstances 'corralled' us into a 'religious blend', but we are recovering the founder's original vision through our Lay MSC and co-workers in parish, school and other ministries.

So today and into the future, I see myself, and happily so, as one among these many, and I share with the many both gifts and roles to complement those of others. Being MSC, we are brothers, priests, lay, all MSC in our own way – as the Founder envisioned it.

Who are . . . who are . . . who are we?

The response to that question seems to me to lie not so much in a focus on what it has meant to be an MSC, but rather what does being MSC really mean today and into the future and who, as MSC, are sent to be on earth the Heart of God.

Philip Malone, MSC

From Nairobi with love...

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” (Psalm 133:1)

The humble inception of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Nairobi Kenya began in 16th July 2023. After a little bit of wandering experience now we are settled at a place called Karen. Karen is well known for the religious communities. If you turn to any side, you may find at least one religious community. Some say it's a mini-Vatican.

Our community consists of five members. Frs. Peter Ng'ang'a, Lucien Beh Evina, Peter Antony and two postulants namely Christopher and Augustine. Though they are postulants, they are doing their philosophy at Consolata Philosophicum around 20 min from our community. Our two students are completing the 1st semester of their second year this December.

We are, for now living in a leased house where we undertake our regular community activities. Being in its early stages, our community strives to build a fraternal and fulfilling framework not only for ourselves MSC, but also for the students. In this, we rely on Emmaus document which specifies the objectives of this stage of formation in our congregation. A schedule focused on studies, community and fraternal life, and prayer ac-



companies us daily. At present our prime focus is on the formation so we are not very much into the pastoral activities. We are expecting few more candidates from January for the internal Aspirancy. Recently, the Superior General and Provincial paid us a visit and we are very happy for that. We are in contact with different groups of religious networks: House Animators, Formators, Religious of Kenya, Vocations Animators etc.

We are grateful to God for all the blessings and all the members for their prayers, support, and encouragement on this journey. “May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere Loved”.

Peter Antony, MSC

Divine Providence

I'm Fr Bruno César do Nascimento, MSC, and since 2018, I've been accompanying our formandi here in the province of Rio de Janeiro. I began this experience in the aspirantate, and since 2021, I have accompanied the formandi who are preparing for the novitiate, in the stage we call the Pre-Novitiate (here in Brazil, we call this stage the year before the formand enters the novitiate).

To talk about my experience as a formator and in the formation of candidates for religious life, I can't fail to mention my experience in the formation process, from the moment I entered the aspirantate to the post-novitiate. I feel that the congregation appeared on my path as a divine providence. I don't know what would have become of me if it hadn't been for the MSC! As with any process,



it was difficult to understand the formation dynamics at first because I was a timid young man and closed in on myself. Little by little, I opened up and discovered who I was and what I could become as a person. I embraced all the opportunities that the training gave me. I grew a lot in human-affective aspects, fraternal relationships, taking care of myself, and the sense of belonging in spiritual life. Growing and maturing was always a burning desire. At the end of the post-novitiate, my formator asked me if I would like to serve the congregation in the formation of future MSCs. At first, I felt a little afraid and insecure. Then I asked him: 'Why did you make this offer to me?' He told me: 'We believe in your potential and everything you've developed during formation. We hope you'll accept this appointment!' With that in mind, I've been living this experience during my initial training. Offering those in formation what I received from the congregation during my formation process.

It's a challenging mission. However, I do my best to help those in formation to be more human, to make contact with their life stories, to touch the wounds and potentiate the springs in each of them. By having this experience, they can increasingly feel loved by God to love everyone, especially the most impoverished. This is an important step on the road to choosing consecrated religious life.

I am happy to be able to help in the formation of future MSCs, and at the same time, I realise the responsibility of this mission. It is an opportunity to ensure my ongoing formation. With those in formation, I am constantly living my formation! May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere, forever! **Bruno Cesar, MSC**

Understanding the Canonization Process

Servants of God and Venerables.



As Postulator General of the Congregation, I am pleased to share some insights about the significance of the titles Servant of God and Venerable within the canonisation process. These are essential initial steps in recognising the holiness of our brothers who lived lives marked by heroic virtue. They represent important milestones on the path toward eventual beatification and canonisation.

Our Christian journey urges us to remember and celebrate the examples of those who have walked before us. However, it is essential to emphasise that while we may revere the Servants of God and Venerables of our Congregation, they cannot be formally considered saints. This article will explore the distinction between these titles, their practical implications for our community life, and the restrictions imposed to ensure the proper progress of their causes.

1. What is a Servant of God?

The title Servant of God is granted to a candidate for canonisation as soon as the Church officially opens the process. This process begins at the diocesan level and constitutes the first formal stage, authorising a thorough investigation into the candidate's life, virtues, and writings. The title does not yet imply official recognition of holiness. Still, it signifies that the candidate is worthy of being examined for the possibility of having lived a life of heroic virtue.

2. What is a Venerable?

The title Venerable is a subsequent recognition granted after a detailed examination of the candidate's virtues. For a Servant of God to be declared Venerable, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints must evaluate whether the candidate lived the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) heroically. Thus, Venerable is a title given to those who demonstrated extraordinary faith and virtue and await a recognised miracle to advance to the next step: beatification. Martyrs are exempt from the requirement of a miracle at this stage.

3. Our Servants of God and Venerables

Currently, our Congregation has the privilege of being involved in eight causes for canonisation, each at different stages. Below is a brief description of our Servants of God and Venerables:

Servants of God

1. Fr. Jules Chevalier (France, 1824-1907). Founder of our Religious Family, Fr. Chevalier, was a visionary who sought to bring the love of the Heart of Jesus to the world. His life of prayer, missionary dedication, and devotion to the Sacred Heart laid the foundation for our congregation and charism.
2. Fr. Emiliano Tardif (Canada, 1928-1999). Born in Canada, Fr. Tardif is known for his ministry of healing and evangelisation, particularly in Latin America. His profound faith and witness to spiritual healing have inspired many to seek a life closer to God.

Venerables

1. Bishop Alain de Boismenu (France, 1870-1953). A missionary bishop in Papua New Guinea, Alain de Boismenu dedicated his life to serving indigenous communities. With

unwavering charity and an evangelising spirit, he lived among the poorest and most vulnerable, building bridges of love and faith in regions scarcely touched by Christianity.

2. Bishop Henri Verjus (Italy, 1860-1892). A missionary and bishop in Papua New Guinea, Verjus devoted his brief life to missionary work under challenging conditions. His dedication to the Gospel in foreign lands and his readiness to face adversity made him an example of total commitment to the service of God and the Church.

Addendum: Servant of God Bishop Federico Kaiser Depel Although not a cause promoted by our Congregation, it is fitting to mention the Servant of God Bishop Kaiser Depel (1903-1980), a Missionary of the Sacred Heart born in Germany. Founder of the Missionary Sisters of Jesus Word and Victim, he distinguished himself by his commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and providing pastoral care in rural and underserved areas. His cause for beatification is promoted by the congregation he founded.

4. Liturgical Restrictions and the Non Cultus Decree

While it is natural for us to remember these brothers in our celebrations, the Church carefully instructs us not to attribute public veneration to Servants of God and Venerables. This precaution is formalised in the Non Cultus decree of Pope Urban VIII (1634), which prohibits public veneration before a candidate’s beatification. The decree aims to prevent unauthorised veneration, which could interfere with canonisation and create false expectations among the faithful. What does this mean in practice?

- Servants of God and Venerables should not be included in litanies, such as during ordination ceremonies or community prayers. Therefore, expressions like “Father Jules Chevalier, pray for us” should not be used.
- Masses in memory of Servants of God or Venerables must follow the day’s liturgical texts. Texts from the Common of Saints or Common of Martyrs cannot be used.
- Under no circumstances should they be mentioned in the Eucharistic Prayer alongside the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, or other saints, as they have not yet received formal recognition by the Church. Until they are beatified, they may only be mentioned among the deceased.

5. Historical Context: Pope Gregory IX and the Audivimus Decree

The need to regulate public veneration of candidates for canonisation dates back to Pope Gregory IX, who issued the Audivimus decree in 1234. During his time, a peculiar situation arose in Sweden, where a man killed in a bar fight was mistakenly venerated as a martyr. Gregory IX decreed that public veneration should be restricted to those formally beatified or canonised by the Church to prevent similar occurrences.

These guidelines remind us of the importance of adhering strictly to the Church’s directives. Any practice suggesting public veneration of a Servant of God or Venerable could

jeopardise the progress of their causes, as premature public worship is considered an obstacle to canonisation.

As MSCs, we are called to value and respect the sanctity of life of the Servants of God and Venerables of our Congregation while also acting in accordance with ecclesial norms. When we remember the anniversaries of these brothers’ deaths, we should do so discreetly, avoiding any liturgical practice that might suggest unauthorised veneration.

Let us remember that the official recognition of holiness occurs in stages, and we must patiently accompany the process, honouring their memory without exceeding the Church’s guidance.

Conclusion

The lives of our Servants of God and Venerables inspire and strengthen us on our missionary journey. By faithfully following the Church’s guidelines, we respect the canonisation process and contribute to their eventual recognition as saints. May our pastoral zeal always be united with respect for ecclesial norms so that these men of God may become lights and examples for future generations.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom these brothers dedicated their lives, continue to inspire and guide us on the path of faith and love for others.

Fernando Clemente, MSC (General Postulator)



Farewell to active Religious Life in the Western world and looking forward to a new future

I am writing this article for three reasons. First, active Religious Life in the Western world suffers from widespread ageing and a meagre number of vocations from Western countries. Even some or all of the three Congregations of the Chevalier Family (MSC, FDNSC, and MSC Sisters) will most probably die out in Europe, Australia, North America, and Canada or will depend on foreign missionaries in the future. What can we, who are directly involved in this process, expect from the future?

The second reason is that this process of phasing out of religious congregations in the Western world goes along with a growing number of lay people associated with these Congregations. For us, that growth concerns an increasing number of Chevalier Associates. What can we expect from them? In answer to that question, I describe very briefly the spirituality that Father Chevalier bequeathed to not only religious but also lay members of the Chevalier Family: a Spirituality of the Heart. Chevalier spoke of 'Devotion to the Sacred Heart,' but to do justice to his vision, it is today better to speak of a Spirituality of the Heart. This spirituality can be meaningful to many people who are seeking meaning in life. The third reason is of a very different kind. Our brothers and sisters in non-Western countries often look with astonishment at the process, which in the religious domain is taking place in the Western world and also affects their mother provinces. Perhaps this brief reflection will help them somewhat.

(In this article, I rely in part on the collection of essays in "Religieu Leven met Toekomst" (Religious Living with a Future,) edited by Arnold Smeets and Henk Witte (Berne Media, Heeswijk 2022). The page numbers behind the quotes refer to this book).

The decreasing number of Religious in Active Congregations in the Western world.

It began in the 1960s. In the Western world, in both male and female active congregations, fewer and fewer candidates were entering, and many members were leaving. The decreasing number of entries and the increasing number of members leaving the Congregations were related to a cultural change that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in the Western world. This cultural change affected social life, church, and religious life. The rebuilding of society after wartime led to increasing prosperity in the Western world. More and



more opportunities opened for girls and boys to pursue higher education and choose from several professions. This went together with a growing desire for autonomy and personal freedom. People demanded the right to participate in decision-making in various areas and requested recognition of their human rights. The possibility of birth control led to families of two or three children, Catholic families not excepted. Even Pope Paul VI's Encyclical 'Humanae Vitae', which banned artificial birth control, did not change this. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) also created a new atmosphere in the Church. What had previously been almost unthinkable, namely the withdrawal of religious after perpetual vows or ordination, was after the Council considered a free, personal choice. The celibacy obligation for priests and the observance of the vow of being unmarried were valued differently, not only among religious and priests but also among Catholics in general.

The Council emphasised the shared responsibility and social commitment of all the faithful as people of God, priests, religious people, and laity. It also stressed the importance of the personal decision of conscience in moral life. And, as Stefan Mangnus o.p. and Henk Witte write, fathers, sisters, and brothers began “to look differently at community life. In our regions, all this took place in a climate of individualisation. Many were breaking away from the dominant regime of the collective. People had to learn to live and work with each other as individuals with their own character. This was not easy and often led to a choice of a different state of life” (p. 34).

We can conclude that neither the decreasing number of candidates nor the increasing number of exits was due to a decline in religious life itself or to unfaithfulness to vows of the religious, who left. The most profound reason may be found in a cultural shift in society since the 1960s and 1970s in the Western world and, related to that, a new vision of Church and Religious Life, as endorsed by the Second Vatican Council. The process that is still taking place today in many areas of society and the Church and in the life of Western congregations shows that, as the Second Vatican Council writes, humanity is entering a new era in its history, in which profound changes are taking place (Gaudium et Spes n.4). Pope Francis once put it this way: we live not only in a time of change but in a change of time.

Change of times and new missionary communities.

In his article ‘Religious Life: a Tradition with Resilience’ (pp. 22-30), Peter Nissen describes how monastics had always read the signs of the times and how, when times and culture changed, they ‘always understood the art of responding to new needs and new challenges in church and society’ (p.24). If new social developments occurred, they would respond to the demands made on them by Church and society. Peter Nissen speaks of ‘the resilience’ of the Religious and points out that the ability of the Religious to respond to social and ecclesiastical challenges is a valuable element that must be maintained for the future (p.25).

With Pope Francis, we may say that the Holy Spirit in every time and place generates ‘forms of practical wisdom’. (Evangelii Gaudium n. 254). The question is, which ecclesial and social developments in the Western world now challenge active congregations to take new paths which may be considered the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit? Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed a new vision of the Church. The Church is not primarily a hierarchical organisation with Pope, bishops and priests as CEOs and the Catholic people as clients, but a community called together by God’s Spirit from all nations, which intends to be a visible sign of solidarity, peace, justice and respect for creation. All baptised persons are called to participate in this mission of the People of God in church and society.

Further developing the Council’s renewed vision of the Church as People of God and its missionary vocation, the

Synod on the Synodality of the Church (2021-2024) placed particular emphasis on the missionary role of the laity in the Church. The Final Document of the Synod writes: “Journeying together as disciples of Jesus, in different places, with the diversity of charisms and ministries, is an effective sign of the presence of God’s love and mercy in Christ” (n. 120). In his address at the end of the Synod (26 October 2024), Pope Francis called the fruits of the Synod “a gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Until recently, communities of men and women who had taken vows often lived in large monastic buildings, strictly separated from the laity. The Synod’s final document, however, speaks of new communities and associations of the laity, which “contribute much to the life of local Churches and the vitality of missionary action” (n.90). What makes these communities new and binds them together is no longer the observance of common vows or promises, but a shared spirituality.

Peter Nissen writes that it is “precisely the connection of one’s own tradition of spirituality together with a personal faith experience” that constitutes the strength of missionary communities. “It is a strength, he writes, that is as relevant as can be. For while ecclesial faith is in sharp decline in our part of the world, the need for spirituality does not seem to be disappearing to the same extent and at the same pace. People are, precisely ... looking for values, which give orientation to their lives and for practices and models, with which to nurture those values” (p. 29).

In Western society, many people search for meaning in life. The lifestyle and social engagement of newly formed communities that are truly driven by “spirituality together with a personal faith experience” may “with their spiritual offerings be an oasis for the seeking person” (p. 29), while presenting them a clearer perspective and a way forward in life.

Looking forward: following Jesus Christ inspired by a Spirituality of the Heart.

Whereas Chevalier’s congregations in the Western world have few or no members of Western origin left, Spirituality of the Heart, inherited from Chevalier, may still show a

*For us, that growth
(lay people) concerns
an increasing number
of Chevalier Associates.*

path to people searching for meaning in life. That process can happen when communities of Chevalier Associates, together with new international religious communities, continue to promote Chevalier's spiritual legacy for the benefit of modern society.

The Second Vatican Council called on every religious congregation to return to the original spirituality of their Founder. As early as the 19th century, Chevalier already envisioned a common project of religious men and women, priests and laity together. He considered lay people, who joined what he called "the movement of the heart," not merely to be objects of pastoral care for the religious and the priests but as being fully engaged Missionaries of the Heart, just like the fathers, brothers and sisters. For him, this participation of lay people was the logical consequence of the social dimension of his perception of the Spirituality of the Heart. Indeed, without the laity, living the Spirituality of the Heart was impossible as a remedy for society's ills. Past and present, the laity can live a Spirituality of the Heart both at home in their families and through how they practice their professions and participate in public life. Chevalier thus bequeathed the Spirituality of the Heart to a community of religious and laity. According to the Council, the heart of the mission of every religious community lies in 'following Jesus Christ, as the Gospel presents it to us.' (Perfectae Caritatis n. 2). The Gospel encourages us to follow the Son of God, who became human. 'With human hands He did work, with a human mind He thought, with a human will He acted, with a human heart He loved' (Gaudium et Spes n. 22). Stefan Mang-

nus and Henk Witte stress the prophetic significance of following Jesus Christ, as we meet Him in the Gospels. After all, authentically lived Christian faith gives a critical voice to Church and society, "standing up for people who are marginalised in society" (p. 41).

Spirituality of the Heart led Chevalier to the conviction that if people knew Jesus of the Gospel better - Jesus, who loves with all his heart - they would love and follow him more. In this way, they will repent of indifference and selfishness, and consequently, society will also be cured of these evils. That is why Chevalier urges his followers to read and contemplate the Gospels and to be guided by a passion for Jesus Christ, who repeatedly shows his merciful heart in the Gospels.

In the Heart of Jesus, he proclaims, we meet the revelation of God's Heart. God's love is at work in the heart of creation and salvation history, driven forward by Christ's Heart's merciful love. Everywhere there is beauty, love and truth, he sees a manifestation of the love of Jesus' Heart. For him, this is the realisation of God's plan, 'to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as Head' (Eph 1:10).

Chevalier teaches us that God shapes every human heart on the model of the human heart of His Son. The deepest desires of the Heart of Jesus desires for love, peace, justice and wholeness of creation also animate our hearts. They are also God's desires. Awakening those desires in the hearts of searching people is at the heart of the mission of the Chevalier Family.

With Chevalier, we can see a new world emerging from the Heart of Jesus, pierced at Calvary. John sees the broken and wounded Heart of Christ as a source of blood and water—a symbol of the birth of new life. For Chevalier, this is a sign of hope that God is transforming our broken world into a new world. With him, we can proclaim that the modern world, despite all its disasters and suffering, is on the way to a new earth.

For Chevalier, 'mission' is first and foremost 'a mission of the heart'. We become 'missionaries of the heart' when we wholeheartedly accept to be sent by Jesus, whose heart is full of love and compassion. The formation of the heart, according to the model of the Heart of Jesus, is a non-negligible part of living Spirituality of the Heart. People discover meaning in their lives when they learn to listen to the voice of Christ and his Spirit in their own hearts, but also learn to 'listen to the heartbeat of the times' and 'listen to what lives in the hearts of people' (Peter Nissen p. 29).

Chevalier saw in living Spirituality of the Heart the remedy for the ills of the times, the diseases of society. In particular, he pointed to selfishness and indifference as the evils that make society ill. Apart from structural and social causes, the ills of modern society, such as selfishness and consumerism, discrimination, violence and the staggering inequality between rich and poor, also arise from the human heart. Pope Francis has the same conviction. He writes: 'The crisis in which the world currently finds itself cannot be solved

Chevalier considered the devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart primarily as a powerful means of bringing people to live a Spirituality of the Heart.

by mere technical measures. What is needed is ‘a conversion or change of heart’ (LS 218). Therefore, we need ‘a spirituality that can change hearts’ (Evangelii Gaudium n. 262). Communities, practising Spirituality of the Heart, contribute to healing the ills of modern times. Also in his encyclical ‘Dilexit Nos’ (‘He loves us’), Pope Francis writes: “The world can change, beginning with the heart” (n. 28). He quotes the Second Vatican Council, which wrote that for the common good we must improve the disposition of our hearts (Gaudium et Spes n.82; Dilexit Nos, n. 29).

“Mission everywhere in the world’ (‘ubique terrarum’) is another integral element of Chevalier’s charism. The deeper reason why we speak of a mission ‘everywhere’ relates to the fact that people in all walks of life, anywhere in the



world, are called to participate in the mission of Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father to carry out his mission throughout the world. The word ‘everywhere’ must, therefore, be understood not only geographically but also sociologically at all levels of society. Communities of Chevalier Associates and international religious communities are therefore called to be pioneers of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Today, cultivating contacts through the Internet might also create a missionary ‘network’ of relationships and thus promote the practical living of a Spirituality of the Heart all over the world. From their own experience of using the internet, Abbot Bernardus Peeters o.c.s.o and Jan Willem Wits write that the digital world opens the door ‘to reach, captivate and bind old and new audiences’ (p.139).

Chevalier considered the devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart primarily as a powerful means of bringing people to live a Spirituality of the Heart. The practice and promotion of a Spirituality of the Heart was the primary goal of Chevalier’s life and ministry. With the same intention today, the devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart might be lived and promoted.

A historical process guided by the Holy Spirit.

The title of this article is “Farewell to Active Religious Life in the Western World.” It will be a farewell to active congregations in their current Western form. But it will be a farewell like parents, who die, say farewell to their children, who will live on. Apart from a possible material heritage, parents leave a spiritual legacy above all. In their way of responding to the challenges of a different time, children will try to integrate core elements of this spiritual legacy into their lives. This is a historical process that repeats itself repeatedly and moves history forward. Thus, as mother provinces, the western congregations of MSC, FDNsc and MSC sisters say farewell to their children, the young provinces and unions in non-western countries. They have formed and guided them for many years, and may now look at the fruits of their missionary efforts in gratitude. In some Western countries, they may even greet missionaries from these young provinces. It is a historical process of progress guided by the Holy Spirit. The challenge that religious congregations in the West now face, namely to say farewell to traditional forms of religious life while moving forward to new forms of missionary life, also constitutes a historical process. It is a process that has been repeated in history over and over again and is necessary to create space for new forms of missionary presence. Fortunately, in our Chevalier Family, we can expect communities of Chevalier Associates, together with the newly formed International religious communities, to continue to live and put into practice the spiritual legacy of Chevalier. The Holy Spirit is also at work in this process. And, as Fr Piperon MSC, a friend of Fr Chevalier, reminds us: “If a religious family does not want to perish, it must lovingly preserve the spirit it received from the founder.”

Hans Kwakman, MSC

Pain and Shame

A path towards
a safeguarding culture

In the recent visits of Pope Francis to Timor-Leste and Belgium, it is unfortunate to read some items from online media about sexual abuse cases by Clerics being raised to get the attention of Pope Francis as head of the Catholic Church. Understandably, it was again an expression of urgent concern that the church must deal with responsibly and expeditiously. The warmth and glamorous welcome accorded to Pope Francis in Timor-Leste were somehow dampened by questions and doubts about the “church’s credibility” because of clergy sexual abuse cases and the perceived inadequacies of the Church’s response. It has been a common observation by some advocacy groups that the Church’s credibility has been compromised by global clergy sexual abuse. As expressed, for example, in the news item from the Associated Press (AP) following some clergy abuse cases in Timor-Leste, “the global clergy sexual abuse scandal that has compromised the Catholic Church’s credibility around the world had finally arrived in Asia’s newest country.” It was about the sexual abuse cases of an American missionary priest Fr. Richard Dashbach, and Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, who are both renowned freedom fighters and are also being considered heroes for Timor-Leste.

More painful to note was what Pope Francis experienced during his visit to Belgium. The online news described it as an “astounding dressing-down by the Prime Minister and King,” which prompted Pope Francis “to express the shame of the church for the scandal and voice his commitment to ending it.”

These are just two recent experiences of Pope Francis as head of the Catholic Church being haunted by the ghost of clergy sexual abuses, though happening in the past, but have continued to bring havoc in the church not only financially but more so on her credibility. Though it may appear unfair and

harsh to presume that these “global cases” have compromised the credibility of the Church yet, it has to be accepted as such with humility given the circumstances that these abuses have continued to occur, which in most instances are in the purview of power, authority, structures and even culture within the church as an institution. That even just one abuse to happen is already a reason to be ashamed of because of the underlying causes that must have created the risk factors of abuse. Pope Francis may have thought about it when he declared, “But even if it were only one (victim), it is enough to be ashamed.”

As a synodal church, the pain and the shame that Pope Francis has courageously and continuously manifested must be at the heart of each one so that all may be challenged to commit to the ministry of safeguarding children and adults with a zero-tolerance stance towards abuse in the church. The MSC as a community formally expressed such commitment in 2011 during the General Chapter held that year. Several documents were produced at various gatherings and occasions in the congregation to flesh out the commitment, which, in 2019, led to the creation of a Safeguarding Office as part of the Generalate structure organised by Tim Brennan. Regarding initiatives, directives, and efforts, the Safeguarding Office has been trying its best, leading the congregation to become more aggressive in safeguarding ministry. In the recent 2023 General Chapter, a Safeguarding Guidelines was endorsed as a guide for all entities to develop their safeguarding policies and programs. While the commitment in 2011 is undoubtedly inspired and challenged in the ministry of safeguarding in the congregation, it is fair to say that at present, much is still to be done, especially at the local level where safeguarding policies and programs are yet to be created and organised or to be sustained effectively for those entities which have already theirs set in place.

To conclude, all should note that the pain and shame that the church must have felt, and of course including the credibility issue raised because of sexual abuse cases in the church, should be taken positively as a path towards a safeguarding culture; “a commitment to conversion away from evil and to healing the wounded”; an invitation to develop one’s integrity in doing ministry. **James Espuerta, MSC**



Days of Togetherness in Japan



When Fr. Chris Chaplin, MSC, one of the MSC General Leadership Team, arrived at our MSC convent in Nagoya on Saturday, November 16, 2024, I was offering Mass at Sabae Catholic Church, one of three churches of Fukui Parish. The following day, Sunday, November 17, Fr. Frits Ponomban MSC and I (together from Indonesia) celebrated Sunday Mass with the congregation of Fukui Catholic Church. We received three cute babies into the Catholic Church during that Sunday Mass. Around 3 pm, Fr. Frits and I went to another parish, Tsuruga Catholic Church, to pick up Fr. Arun Kumar, MSC (from India). In one car, we went to the next parish, Kakamigahara Catholic Church, to meet Fr. John Graham MSC (from Australia) and Fr. Joey Mission MSC (from the Philippines), who had arrived there from Ogaki Catholic Church. We went together by two cars to the RSCJ retreat house in Susono, Shizuoka Prefecture, and arrived there around 11 pm. We then met Fr. Priyo Susanto MSC (from Indonesia) at the front door, who had arrived earlier from Konan Catholic Church. Fr. Brian Taylor MSC and Fr. Kenji Konda MSC (both from Australia) also had arrived from Gifu Catholic Church. Fr. Chris, Fr. Keith Humphries MSC (from Australia), and Fr. Bern Tethool MSC (from Indonesia) had also arrived by car from Nagoya.

On a quiet Monday, November 18, in the dining room, I was going to put a classical CD into the player when Fr. Chris came to me and greeted me warmly that morning. "Good morning, Carol." "Ah, Chris, good morning. Good to see you." Soon after, Fr. Rey Tibon, MSC (from the Philippines), arrived at the retreat house from Johokubashi Catholic Church. So, twelve of the MSCs started that first-day retreat together in Susono. Fr. Chris invited us to slow down and fully arrive before we began our retreat journey. On the first day, He led us to see again many encounters in our days, especially our first encounter with the Lord in our vocational journey as MSC. On the second day, He invited us to a deep intima-

cy with Jesus, to come as we are, to be more open and vulnerable with Jesus. On the third day, he encouraged us to let Jesus transform our hearts by letting go of everything that hindered our deep relationship with Him. The process of surrendering everything to Jesus the Light continued on the fourth day. We were helped to recognise many kinds of stones in our hearts and to let them go in front of the light of Jesus. We were encouraged that the abundance of our hearts enables the transformation of our whole hearts so that we could let come fully the mission given by the Lord. To bring the love of Jesus to the world, our hearts were greeted, invited, challenged, and sent by His spirit. I remember that Fr. Chris said that as MSC, we are echoing the heart of Jesus in the world. We are called not only to be MSC but to become MSC; not only to be brothers but to become brothers. Fr. Sadami Takayama, MSC (from Japan), arrived at the retreat house from Shirayuri University on the fourth day. Thirteen of the MSC could be met again in the retreat house. We had lauds together, breakfast, morning conference, and personal reflection time. In the afternoon, we had another conference and daily Mass. After dinner, we had adoration and social time together. We will probably forget many conferences, but the unique presence of each conference has been deeply carved inside the heart. Thanks to Fr. Chris for the accompaniment during the retreat.

On Friday, November 22, we renewed our vows during the closing Mass and had dinner together before we left the retreat house. Fr. Chris entered Fukui's car again and went home with Fr. Frits, Fr. Arun and I. On the way back, we turned our car into a karaoke room. We had a fun singing time together in the car. Fr. Frits drove us to the Hamamatsu Rest Area. Fr. Arun drove us to Tsuruga Parish, where Fr. Chris rested for one night, and I drove Fr. Frits to Fukui Parish. The next day, around 6 pm, I went to Fukui train station to pick up Fr. Chris and spent some

minutes talking at a bread shop together. Before 7 pm, we had to go to the reserved Japanese meat restaurant. By one car, Fr. Chris and I picked up Fr. Frits and ate dinner together. I'm grateful for the close synodal encounter with Fr. Chris in Fukui. What a special gift. The next day, we celebrated Sunday Mass together and had dinner before going by car to Nagoya for our two days of assembly.

Brother Babetara Anetoka MSC (from Kiribati) renewed his vows during the 5 pm Mass on the first day of the MSC Japan Community 2024 Assembly. Fr. Toan Dinh Vinh MSC (from Vietnam) and Deacon Devid Abram MSC (from Indonesia) also participated in the Eucharist. Three of them could not

join the retreat and the assembly because they had classes at the Center of Japanese Studies of Nanzan University. Fr. Chris accompanied us during the assembly. On the first day, November 25, we listened to reports and sharings from each confrere. On the second day, November 26, we read the MSC Japan Community's Statutes in Japanese and English. Thanks for the open conversations. Otsukaresamadeshita. Fr. Chris went back to Rome on Wednesday, November 27. We will meet again on another day as MSC, bounded by the same spirit of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What a journey. What a deep friendship. 神に感謝。Thanks be to God.

Carol Sompotan, MSC

Faustino Villanueva Centre

The Centre for Youth Promotion and Rural Development 'Faustino Villanueva' was founded by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1984 and is located 355 kilometres north of the capital city of Guatemala, in the municipality of Chahal, Alta Verapaz, with a travel time of six hours. The departmental capital is the city of Cobán, at a distance of 175 kilometres, with an average journey time of four hours. It is a population belonging to the Q'eqchi' culture, whose economic subsistence is based on agriculture (maize-beans-chilli-cattle-livestock), and in other cases, work outside the municipality. Faustino Villanueva is named after the martyrdom of Fr. Faustino Villanueva, MSC, murdered in the parish of Joyabaj in the department of Quiché, Guatemala. Four years after the martyrdom of Fr. Faustino, the Centre arose as a response to the needs of this population suffering from the need for the bread of knowledge.

Since its beginnings, the Villanueva Centre has offered a boarding school, a place to stay for young people from faraway places who, due to distance or poverty, do not have the means or resources to return to their homes. Within the Centre is the San Agustín Technical Vocational Institute, with basic and diversified education, which are the studies required to continue university studies. Also, the Centre facilitates various occupational workshops to become entrepreneurs and learn a trade. The motto of the Centre is 'open doors to education'. The teaching pedagogy is 'learning by building'.

All these activities make it a comprehensive training, allowing young people to respond to professional skills when pursuing higher education or finding a job. As a re-



sult of this work, after forty years of serving in this Educational Centre, the municipality currently has more than 80% of professionals who are graduates of this educational establishment and many people who have benefited from scholarships, workshop training, etc.

Due to its geographical position, the Faustino Villanueva Centre continues to be a current response and an oasis of opportunity, as it is the only establishment with a boarding school in the municipality and neighbouring municipali-

ties; on the other hand, the Centre continues to prioritise the least favoured sector of people in poverty or extreme poverty and, finally, it is a Centre that continues to promote means to eradicate hunger and care for the environment. The major concern of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Faustino Villanueva Centre is to continue to respond to the evils of our time, as Fr. Chevalier points out, and that through this service the heart of Christ continues to be loved everywhere.

Jairo Sevilla, MSC

Jubilaria

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Belgian Province. Monday, 21 October 2024, was a day of grace and joy for the MSC confreres of the Belgian Province. All Belgian confreres, including the confreres of the ICB (International Community Belgium) and the African confreres working in pastoral ministry in Wallonie, were invited to the MSC house of Bergerhout to celebrate together the Jubilarians of this year 2024. There were two golden Jubilarians with 50 years of priestly ordination. Jozef Geeurickx (Zeca) celebrated his 50 years of priestly ordination on 21 July 2024 in his native village, Opwijk, with parishioners, his family and a delegation of the MSC and the Lay associates. He has since returned to San Salvador in Latin America for his work. The 2nd Jubilarian Father Jozef Van de Velde, who had prepared the whole celebration very well, could not preside over the Eucharist due to health issues. Fortunately, his substitute replaced him with dignity in a beautiful Eucharistic celebration thanks to Fr. Joseph's preparations. Above all, we thanked the Lord for all the good our jubilarians were able to accomplish during these long years of service as Good Shepherds in the Lord's vineyard. We also included the other jubilarians of ordination and profession in our hymns, prayers, and songs. After the Eucharist, we were all together for a reception and a nice meal at a restaurant opposite the house. It should be noted that it was not only the main jubilarian, Jozef Van de Velde, who had to be absent. Unfortunately, of the 29 guests expected for the party, seven had to send their apologies due to health reasons.

In the afternoon, everyone listened with great attention and interest to the information the Architect and Project Manager provided regarding the construction of the new MSC house in Bergerhout. Yes, the Belgian MSC Province had decided for years to build a new home there, as the current one is far too large and cumbersome for the small number of confreres still living there. Recently, large machines have entered our land to demolish the parish hall next to the church and prepare the ground. These preparations have now been completed, and the construction of the new premises has begun.

After this info session and a nice cup of coffee and cake, much appreciated by the confreres, everyone was ready to go home.

Oscar Vermeir, MSC



Korean Provincial Chapter



I arrived in Korea to facilitate the Province Chapter held on October 28 – November 1 in their new Provincial House near Seoul. Benedict Ko, the incumbent provincial, was very enthusiastic about their new provincial house building in Gyeong-gi. It is very modern and comfortable. All facilities are provided for a community of thirteen members, particularly the older men who reside there.

I injured my back on the last day of retreat in the Philippines, so I moved very carefully during that week. I am grateful to the province for getting me a mattress that supported my back. Then, during the week of the Chapter, they introduced me to acupuncture and chiropractic manipulation. It

was extremely helpful and enabled me to do the work I had to do without pain. The hospitality of our confrères in Korea is worthy of praise and appreciation.

I prepared the facilitation with Ireneo Lee and the other members of the Chapter Task Force (Preparation Committee) and with Sr. Nathaneal MSC, who translated for us.

The Chapter was held in the Chapel. Half the pews were removed, and five circular tables were placed in the space created towards the rear of the Chapel, mirroring the General Chapter layout. Each table held five to six capitulants. Translation was enabled through a special broadcasting room in the loft at the rear of the Chapel. The Chapter pro-

cess was Communal Wisdom, with prayerful reflection on the chapter agenda, followed by table sharing at the level of “me.” After a second short reflection, the groups would share the insights that had come for the whole province at the “we” level, with recommendations flowing from this communal voice. The Chapter theme was “from EGO to ECO” A spirit of community and apostolate direction for the future. Acts 4:32 “One heart and one spirit.”

The capitulants commented positively on the difference between the parliamentary process they had used in their two previous Chapters and the ease and calmness of this methodology.

Significant recommendations of the Chapter flowed from reflection on replies from a consultation of the Districts and reports given by committees on Formation, Spirituality, Finance and Architecture Master Plan, JPIC, Communication, Safeguarding, Social Welfare, and Mission. A session with the Lay MSC encouraged them to join the tables with the capitulants and enter into the communal wisdom process. This allowed some very fruitful resolutions to be proposed.

Midway through the Chapter, the Provincial election took place, and Fr. Damaso Shin was elected on the second ballot. He takes office at the end of the year. On the final day of the chapter, ballots for council members were held, and the result was that Fr. Matthew Park, Br. Fran-

cisco, Fr. Abraham Lee, and Fr. Richard Kim were elected to the new Council.

The Chapter was an incredibly positive experience and remarkably successful, given that I speak no Korean and that the entire process required translation. We congratulate Damaso and his new Council on their election and offer them our prayers for a smooth transition and God’s blessing upon them over the next three years of leadership. Gratitude and congratulations to the whole province and their dedication to their MSC life and the Congregational mission.

Chris Chaplin, MSC



An essay on the achievements and challenges of msc religious life in francophone africa

MSC religious life in French-speaking Africa predates the establishment of the entity. In fact, in this year of grace, we are celebrating the Centenary of the arrival of MSC in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the oldest of the missions in 1924, compared to Senegal in 1953 and Cameroon in 1981, which are the three countries making up the Union of French-speaking Africa under the direct dependence of the General Administration since 06 August 1986. It was following a succession of meetings convened by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples between October 1976 and February 1977 that the so-called ‘Africanisation of religious life’ was launched, recorded in a document dated 03 June 1978. Following this invitation from the Holy See, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart from the Regions of Senegal, Cameroon and Zaire, meeting in Kinshasa from 27 April to 02 May 1983, produced a document on ‘African Vocations and MSC Formation in Africa’.

On the eve of the Emerald Jubilee in 1986-2026, it would be wise to reflect on these decades of MSC religious life by asking two simple questions: What has been done, and what remains to be done?

I. What has been achieved

In the introduction to our UAF Statutes and Directory, it is stipulated that the primary aim of setting up an entity is ‘to root the charism of their founder on African soil’ (SD 3.a), which charism is to make known the unfathomable richness of the Sacred Heart. It is convinced of this spirituality of the Heart that each MSC assumes its responsibilities in the different apostolates.

1. Parish and Diocese

MSCs are responsible for the pastoral care of souls in eight dioceses and fifteen parishes in French-speaking Africa. This is still the legacy of the pioneers who sometimes left them entire mission territories. CS 23. Depending on the availability of confreres, the superiors try to create an MSC community directly associated with parish life. It will organise itself to assume a religious life, a witness of life for the members within and for the parishioners and people of every religion and culture in the territory. Parish and community life are intertwined because the confreres are the responsibility of the Parish and, therefore, of the Diocese. Depending on whether they are in a rural or urban parish, the congregation provides additional support for the running of the community. For nearly a

decade, some communities have been autonomous and sometimes come to the aid of communities that are still financially weak. The confreres in the parishes obey all diocesan directives concerning the pastoral care of souls in the parish church. This does not prevent the confreres' initiatives and genius, such as the foundation and animation of our lay groups, vocational pastoral care and self-financing projects for community life, but also for parish life.

2. House of formation

With the aim of perpetuating the legacy of Father Jules Chevalier, a few have been chosen to ensure the apostolate of formation in our houses of Pre-Novitiate in Dakar (Senegal) and Kinshasa (DR Congo), Novitiate in Brazzaville (Congo) and Post-Novitiate in Yaoundé (Cameroon) without forgetting the internal and external Aspirants. The current academic year is being reorganised, particularly at the Pre-Novitiate stage, as the entity would like to have a single training centre for each stage. First-year pre-novices are now sent to Kimwenza-Kinshasa, where the setting is suitable, and the novitiate has been transferred to Brazzaville since the General Council Decree of 11 April 2024. These houses are dedicated to training of future confreres but also constitute living communities for the MSCs who live there, striving to practice what they teach young people. Hence, a particular spirit of sacrifice for those on the inside and apprehension for those on the outside, as the requirements differ depending on whether one is in one case or the other.

3. Schools

Over the last ten years or so, in order to embody our charisma and make our presence visible in the world, and also to ensure our future from a financial and economic point of view, our districts have been provided with schools for both primary and secondary education. The DRC is the oldest, followed by Cameroon and, most recently, Senegal. Confreres have been trained in leadership, management, and teaching in various fields. This

constitutes a genuine apostolate for all the children, adolescents and adults taking part in the running and life of these structures, which can prove to be a vocational breeding ground.

4. Secular Associations

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart sometimes precedes us and sometimes arrives in the MSC suitcase. The Fraternity of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is one of our various sub-entities. In addition to the best-known Fraternity, in some countries, we have the Lecteurs des Annales d'Issoudun and the Amicale des Parents et Amis, which meet on the important feast days of the Congregation, namely 21 October, 8 December, the last Sunday in May for the Solemnity of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and the second Sunday after Pentecost for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. While these associations retain their internal autonomy, the fact remains that the MSCs are still the spiritual guides and companions, some of whom receive a special mandate and appointment from the Superiors. This is the concrete manifestation of our membership of the 'Chevalier Family'.

5. Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Missionaries of Christ and Servants of the Sacred Heart

Relations with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart are all the closer because they share with us the very Spirituality of Father Jules Chevalier. We are practically present in the same countries. Our paths cross so often during the stages of formation and missions that we can say they are indeed our Sisters. In addition to the FNDSC, depending on the country, there are the Missionaries of Christ founded by the confreres Father Christian MOSER in 1956 in Germany and the Sisters Servants of the Sacred Heart founded by the Vicar Apostolic Van GOETHEN of Coquilherville (now Mbandaka) in 1942 in Bokote in Zaire (now DR Congo). They are affectionately called 'nieces'. As far as possible, we will meet again for the major feasts of the congregation, which are similar to ours and other important occasions such as Jubilees and Vows. This is not only a spiritual



closeness but also a sociological one, as many FNDSC and MSC come from the same villages or even biological families.

6. Vocation Apostolate

While it is true that our parishes and schools can be breeding grounds for vocations to the MSC way of life, it has seemed prudent over the last few decades to set up a genuine vocational policy to encourage young people to embrace our way of life. Thus a vocational committee is operational in the districts, which organises vocational camps and meetings, as well as selection and admission tests to be submitted to the district and UAF council of superiors for approval while respecting certain pre-established criteria.

II. The challenges

Beyond this shining and encouraging face of MSC religious life that each confrere tries to promote and live according to the gifts of grace and nature, we also face the moment’s challenges.

1. Internationality and/or Multiculturalism

Seen from the outside, Africa appears to be a homogenous entity, but seen up close, it is a disparate mosaic of countries, nations, tribes, ethnic groups and clans that come and go according to the opportunistic interests that we can observe, especially on the political level. Although we come from this socio-anthropological soil, we firmly believe and strive to make effective the fact that ‘in the congregation, there are no strangers and no passing guests’ (JC 1897). This is made possible by the fact that the itinerary of our initial formation brings us face to face with the particular realities in the different countries of the entity, to the point that in the end, each MSC feels at home everywhere, leaving the rest to strictly personal moods and incompatibilities. This spirit is called ‘MSCéité’.

2. Mission ad extra

As a formator at the Novitiate stage, the novices ask a recurring question of internationality in all its forms. On entering the Congregation, many of them had an idea of mission ad extra as experienced by their companions and friends in other institutes. The question is not naïve because it is still topical in people’s minds. This extra mission obviously obeys legal, human, financial and ideological parameters, which are the responsibility of the higher hierarchy. As long as the congregation’s mission is to spread the riches of the heart of the divine master, then it can be done everywhere because the needs are everywhere.

3. Heritage of the pioneers

Our UAF entity will soon be celebrating its 40th anniversary and is relatively young. The proof is that we depend on the General Administration, and competencies are delegated. Many of us still know the pioneers of the Mother Provinces who planted the seed of Jules Chevalier’s spiritual heritage on African soil. To be their successors is a source of pride because the next generation is assured of a great responsibility to nurture this seed in terms of community spirit, dedication and sacrifice to the mission, initiati-



ve, maintenance of structures and management of property. It is not uncommon for former parishioners to recall with great nostalgia the great days of the past, which is both a source of pride for us and a source of pressure to follow in their footsteps despite the changes of the present day.

4. Financial autonomy

The other stumbling block is the funding of this same mission. We recall the warning issued by Monseigneur Dupont, Archbishop of Bourges, to the two vicars of Issoudun: ‘...Providence is all very well, but you must not tempt it...’ (1854). It is with this in mind that each of us feels concerned about the immediate future of the Congregation on African soil, especially as we aspire to a more autonomous entity like the Province. Our schools, considered sources of self-financing, are accompanied by a collective awareness of sound management and effective pooling to encourage the participation of all in the advent of this new entity.

Conclusion

‘As long as the hand of God is with us, trust is a duty’ (J.C1866) or “My conviction is that according to the plans of Divine Providence, our Society is destined for great things and a great future, but on condition that it is not half-religious but that it is complete and unreserved” (JC 1887).

Reassured by the Father Founder’s words that we are his spiritual Sons within the UAF, let us continue our march towards a radiant future, for Africa is and will soon be one of the Congregation’s wards.

Hassan Mouchi Jonas, MSC

The International Community in Issoudun

Birthplace of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart

The Mother House, a place of remembrance and mission for the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, is located in Issoudun (Archdiocese of Bourges) in the department of Indre in the heart of France. This is where the Congregation began. Since its foundation on 8 December 1854, Issoudun has been a point of reference for all the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart worldwide. At the Mother House, each community member can follow in the footsteps of Father Jules Chevalier (Founder) and his first companions and draw on the essence of his charism. The Mother House is a place of silence, a haven of peace that nourishes the quest for God of the faithful, pilgrims and tourists, with its magnificent basilica and luminous chapel, its crypt and its beautiful pilgrimage park... it is here that some confreres from the province like to come for a break or a rest to 'recharge their batteries'. In addition to the provincial superior, six confreres live here daily, forming what is known as the 'Motherhouse International Community'.

The international community came into effect in September 2017 with a Community Project adapted to the new situation. This latest mission community was born out of a request from the France/Switzerland Province to the 2011 General Chapter (Madrid): 'We need you so that Issoudun lives at the heart of the Congregation'. The 2011 Chapter accepted this request. Under the direction of the General Administration, the entire MSC Congregation now assumes responsibility for the mission carried out in Issoudun. After a period of reflection on the scope of the project by the General Administration and the Province, the General Conference of September 2014 (Guatemala) established that there would be a single missionary community that would take charge of the entire pastoral reality in Issoudun.

Father Abzalón, Superior General, is the major superior of the community. He appoints the community members for a fixed term of six years (renewable). He may delegate some of



his responsibilities to the Provincial Superior (Father Daniel), who is legally responsible to the French State for all the MSC living within the province.

Issoudun: A place of mission and international experience

The Issoudun community is a reflection of the Congregation in its missionary, international and intergenerational character. In 2024, the motherhouse community will have six members divided into two teams: Shrine/Basilica Team: Sebastian RAYAPPAN from India (rector), Jean Noël Bassirou FAYE from Senegal (vice-rector), Raymond LIEVRE (France), Gérard BLATTMANN (Switzerland). Parish team: Sumner GENESTE from Haiti (parish priest), Martin ANTONY SAMY (vicar). MSC, in our daily community life, we learn to welcome each other in our diversity of culture and language and to be enriched by our differences. Attentive to discovering God's will through daily realities, we seek in fraternal communion the responses to bring to the calls of Christ and the Church in the living tradition of our Little Society.

Among the issues/challenges facing our international community, we can cite the following: real inculturation in the French ecclesial landscape, which is experiencing strong secularisation. This requires a great deal of creativity to create something new while respecting this Marian and missionary place.

Issoudun: A place where the MSC charism is lived out and a source of the spirituality of the Heart

Our Community seeks to draw ever more deeply on the inspirational source of our Congregation so that we can grow together as brothers and bear witness to a God of love in today's world. The community's field of action includes the pastoral care of the parish of St Vincent in Champagne Berrichonne and the mission and ministry at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.



The Shrine Team... The Shrine is open all year round. It welcomes pilgrims, who come in small numbers during the winter and large numbers from Easter to October, individually or in groups. An annual theme allows the rich spirituality of the Sacred Heart to unfold, as Father Chevalier was fond of saying: 'Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart is the natural complement of devotion to the Sacred Heart'. The team is on hand to welcome visitors throughout the week and offers spiritual activities, conferences and spiritual weekends. The pastoral challenge facing the Shrine of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Issoudun undoubtedly has several faces. Still, it is a multi-faceted challenge: welcoming, listening and accompanying. Welcoming humanity in all its diversity, poverty and riches, welcoming as Christ welcomes: in truth and charity. As an MSC, it seems to me that the Shrine of Issoudun is a privileged place to make this clear to the people who come here. Our geographical location means we are at the crossroads of relations between east and west, north and south of France. Many pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela pass through Issoudun, on the route jacquaire. Welcome, listen to and accompany the people who come here in truth and charity. Issoudun is a privileged place to experience this. It's important that pilgrims who cross the threshold of the shrine or basilica feel they are treated like family. They should feel at home, expected, loved and looked upon with eyes of mercy. Through the Shrine Team, the community also welcomes members of the Chevalier Family who wish to come to Issoudun for a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Father Jules Chevalier, or to take time out to pray and reflect.



The team in charge of the parish. The parish of Saint Vincent in Champagne Berrichonne is a rural mission whose heart and soul is the town of Issoudun. However, we must know that the population has massively dropped from religious practice. There is a considerable evangelisation challenge in this central part of the diocese. It's a significant challenge, made all the more difficult by the lack of desire and low expectations of many of our contemporaries, especially when preparing for the sacraments (marriage and baptism in particular). They expect a 'service' from priests rather than help in their Christian life journey. Our MSC elders in Europe, who have more experience, invite us to be attentive to everything that lifts us, even if it seems derisory. Even in the problematic practice of faith or the clumsiness of requests, there are waiting stones that we must learn to detect. In France, the number of young and adult catechumens increases every year. In a recent letter from the bishops to the Catholics of France, they invite us to be creative and daring in our mission, recognising the positive contribution of priests from elsewhere with the richness of a different culture.

The confreres on mission in the parish are helped by the Shrine Team to celebrate Masses at weekends, given the size of the pastoral territory (44 parishes). A more global challenge is that of a sort of 'renewal in continuity', to use the words of Benedict XVI. This concerns several areas of the parish and customs that are sometimes different from our places of origin. We must be careful not to revolutionise everything while simultaneously bringing in the richness of our countries' experience. It's a question of setting up a creative 'fraternity'. We must not forget that our Constitutions speak of 'mission in fraternity'. (CS MSC ch. 3, art. 2)

The two Teams would like to be artisans of unity, communion and comfort through genuine listening, a 'favourable a priori' for all who knock on our door. We are aware of the tremendous spiritual thirst and sometimes the emptiness of knowledge of the faith. We are convinced that our spirituality of the heart responds to many of the expectations of our contemporaries. In our ministry and prayer life, it is undeniably a precious asset. It gives us greater strength in our pastoral work. And it is a stimulus for our sanctification. Knowing that we are supported by community prayer can be very comforting when the crosses of ministry seem too heavy. The awareness of having received a common heritage makes daily life lighter.

Issoudun: A place of insertion in the Province and the local Church

We maintain healthy and open relations with the Province of France/Switzerland, participating in the province's life and keeping the Provincial informed as much as possible of our plans, missionary projects and pastoral activities. Through the parish priest and the rector, we maintain a healthy and constructive relationship with Mgr Jérôme Beau, the Archbishop of Bourges. The community participates actively and fully in the life of the archdiocesan presbyterate and relevant diocesan meetings and events.

Jean Noël Bassirou FAYE, MSC



A Missionary of the Sacred Heart Serving the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

On September 23, 2024, our confrere, Fr. Armando Genovese, MSC, a member of the MSC Community of Italy, was appointed as a consultant for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Fr. Armando is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome.

We are deeply grateful to the Holy Father for entrusting this mission to a Missionary of the Sacred Heart. At the same time, we wholeheartedly acknowledge and appreciate Fr. Armando's generous willingness and dedication to this service, which contributes to the mission of the Universal Church.

Golf Tournament

On Friday, September 13, the Pennsylvania MSC held its 38th Golf Tournament at the Whitetail Golf Club, Bath, PA. Over 100 golfers were on the course to support the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. God blessed us with beautiful weather. Our villa's cook, Eric Lipscomb, members of Holy Family Parish, Nazareth, and St. John the Baptist Church, Ottsville, prepared a banquet dinner in the Holy Family parish hall for the tired but happy golfers. Several persons received winners' awards for their success. Of course, the MSC members present had to sing their MSC Song.





MSC APIA Gathering 2024

The MSC APIA (Asia Pacific Island and Australia) gathering was held in Bangalore, India, from 23 to 28 September 2024. In this biennial meeting, delegates from nine countries (India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Vietnam, Australia) were divided into four groups, namely Provincial, Trustees, Safeguarding, and JPIC.

A number of items were on the agenda, including reports on activities in each entity and a discussion of recommendations from the last General Chapter. On the final day, participants received input on artificial intelligence. The meeting resulted in a number of recommendations for the Provincial, APIA territory, and General levels. The next APIA meeting is scheduled to take place in Korea.





Indian Elective Assembly

2-3 October 2025. The first Indian Elective Assembly took place over two days in early October. All of the Province in India members attended the Assembly held at the Camilians Pastoral Centre, Carmelaram Bangalore. Those in overseas appointments had the chance to participate online. The whole process flowed easily, prayerfully, and with a deep sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Bram Tulusan attended as delegate of the Superior General, Simon Lumpini was also present, and I had the privileged task of facilitating the proceedings. The Assembly staff worked together very well to ensure a smooth and confidential voting process, particularly the two scrutineers, Fr. Bhaskar Raj and Deacon Arokia Samy. Congratulations to them. The election of Fr. John Chinnappan, MSC, as provincial elect was very clear, with a simple majority being reached on the first ballot. He and his council take up office in early December. The election of Council took place on the second day with Fr. Charles Babu, Fr. Jesu Arokiam, Fr. Arokia Swamy, Fr. Ragu Immanuel, and Fr. Victor Raghu forming the new council. Congratulations to Fr. John and his new team; we ask God's blessing on them.

Special thanks to Fr. Darwin Thatheus and his council for their years of service as leaders of the Indian Union and their journey to becoming the Indian Province. Darwin's term spanned just over six years and saw much development in the province's infrastructure and administrative restructuring.



In the new year, he will take up the position of executive officer of the General Administration Mission Development Project Office. Congratulations to the whole province of India. We wish them every blessing as they spread the mission of the Congregation into new places and hearts in the coming years.

Chris Chaplin, MSC

PROFESSIONS AND ORDINATIONS (October-December 2024)

PERPETUAL VOWS

Name	Entity	Date
Miguel Alejandro Ibarra Escalante	Ireland	15.10.2024
Thiago Henrique Soares da Silva, Leonardo Machado de Araújo, Aldiclei Oliveira Lima	São Paulo	15.10.2024
Diego Omar Zambrano Chavarria	Curitiba	12.11.2024
Hoa Quoc Tran	Australia	28.11.2024

DIACONATE ORDINATION

Name	Entity	Date
Excellent Noelguens & Gresnord Brutus	Dominican Republic	12.11.2024
Benjamin Uriel Awono Etogo	UAF	12.11.2024
Cristian David Mancuello Arias	Spain	16.11.2024
Èric Disney Ngagoum Kengne, Jean Jacques Florian Nongassida Valea, Romain Danem	UAF	25.11.2024
Leonardo Henrique Silva Agostinho	São Paulo	25.11.2024
Antonio Posadas Cruz	USA	25.11.2024
Vu Thanh Nguyen & Thanh Van Le	Australia	28.11.2024

PRIESTHOOD ORDINATION

Name	Entity	Date
Excellent Noelguens	Dominican Republic	12.11.2024
Thanh Vu Nguyen	Australia	09.12.2024
Roberto BUTEAU	Dominican Republic	09.12.2024

NECROLOGIUM (Deceased members from October-December 2024)

Name	Province	Date	Place
Jacobus Adrianus (Jacob) Kuijs	Nederlands	22.10.2024	Tilburg
Samuel Bomaris	Indonesia	09.11.2024	Saumlaki
Terence Bowman	Australia	24.11.2024	Australia
Paul Guy	Australia	28.11.2024	Australia
Stefan Radermacher	North Germany	01.12.2024	Münster
Engelbert Vanneuville	Belgium	07.12.2024	Duffel



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Merry
Christmas
and Happy
New Year



Missionaries of
the Sacred Heart