

# GENERAL BULLETIN

MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART

JUNE 2025

*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be given to  
the whole world forever!*

Dear confreres, 'Habemus Papam!' These words mark the beginning of a new era in the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope Leo XIV. We pray for Pope Leo XIV that he may be a good shepherd for all of us in these changing times.

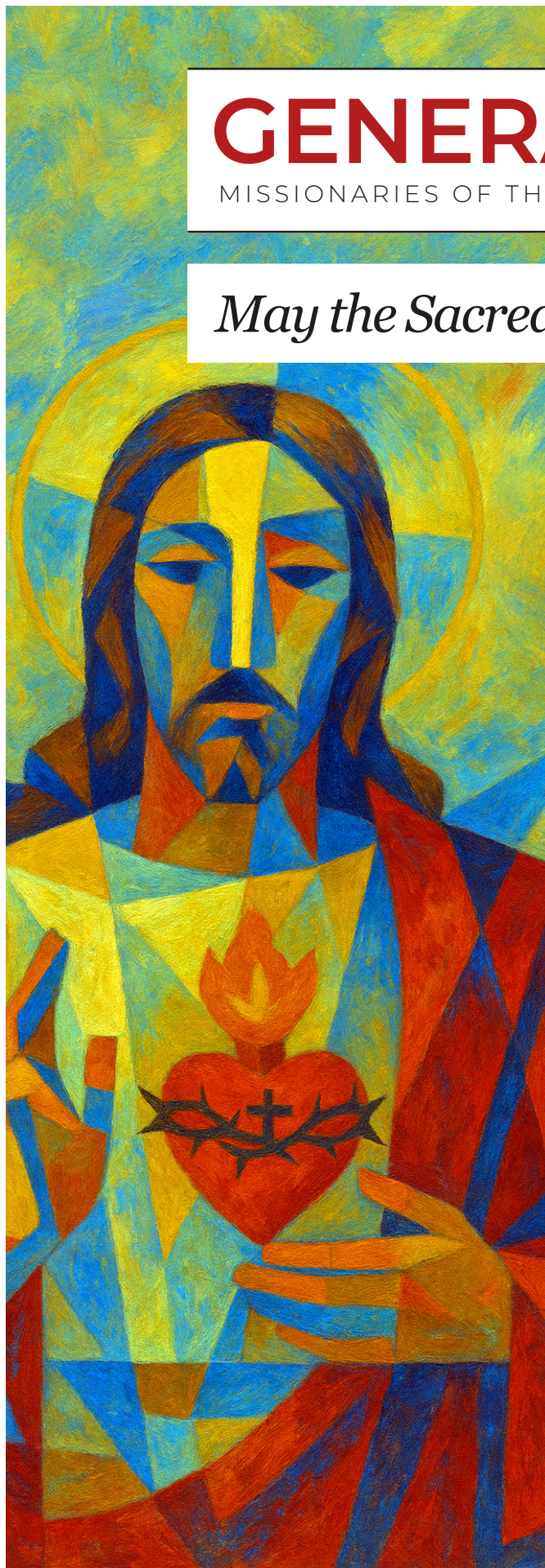
We welcome you to the second edition of the 2025 general bulletin, themed "The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Encyclical Dilexit Nos." As we enter the holy month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our hearts are once again drawn to the boundless love and mercy that flow from His Heart. Currently, we are reminded that Jesus' love is not something distant or abstract. It is a personal, gentle, and concrete love.

One of Pope Francis' important legacies is the encyclical Dilexit Nos ("He Loved Us"), which, with his pastoral heart and constant call for mercy, urges us to reflect on the Heart of Christ not only as an image of divine love but also as a model for us, so that our hearts may become more sensitive and merciful towards the suffering around us.

In this edition, we will also share some testimonies about Pope Francis from our confreres and friends. And, of course, there will be some reflections and interesting news from various MSC entities around the world.

Thank you to all who contributed to the publication of this bulletin. To the editorial team (Javier Trapero, John Walker, Daniel Augie, and Simon Lumpini), thank you for your dedication. Especially, let us remember one of our editorial team members, Raymond Lievre, who passed away last April. He always gave his best for our media. May God welcome him into eternal life in heaven.

I Fransiskus Bram Tulusan, MSC I





MISSIONARI  
DEL  
SACRO CUORE

Via Asmara, 11 - 00199 Roma

Tel. 06.862.20.61 - Fax 06.862.15.627

## Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Rome, 27 June 2025

To all Missionaries of the Sacred Heart,

Dear Confreres,

On this Solemnity, so full of meaning, we reach out to you in communion and hope. Each year, this Feast gathers us around the Heart of the One who first loved us. He loves us with a human heart and calls us to be the Heart of God amid the core realities of our modern world.

On behalf of the entire General Administration, I take this opportunity to pause and honour the *heartbeat* of your mission: in each one of you, in each community, in every corner where our vocation as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart continues *to beat* with strength, humility, and fidelity.

We celebrate this Solemnity in a wounded world. The wars and hostility erupting across the planet, lament the drama of a divided humanity, of perpetuated hatred, and of life disregarded. Millions of our brothers and sisters live through forced displacement, violence, and despair. Our world stands like a child on the edge of an era marked by seismic shifts, relentless transformations, and earth-shaking disruptions. Faced with these realities, we cannot afford to lose the focus of our missionary vocation in hopelessness and exhaustion.

Pope Francis reminds us in his last encyclical, *Dilexit nos*, that the Heart of Christ shines as a source of light and love, capable of unifying what is scattered and of restoring to the world what it most deeply needs: its heart. We are called to have a heart wounded by the world's pain but not resigned to it; a heart open to the outcast, willing to get its hands dirty, to heal wounds, and to reach out to those who have fallen. From this springs our hope.

As a Congregation, we too are living through this tumultuous era. Unanticipated challenges are compelling us to navigate differently and adapt our structures to accommodate new and emerging realities. Not only do we need to reorganize the external structures, but so too our ways of life and mission, so that they respond more faithfully to the charism we have received.

Under the theme of our upcoming General Conference—***"Walking Together, Building Structures that Serve"***—we seek every decision to be inspired by a truly synodal spirituality based on listening, communal discernment, and creative initiatives.





MISSIONARI  
DEL  
SACRO CUORE

Via Asmara, 11 - 00199 Roma

Tel. 06.862.20.61 - Fax 06.862.15.627

On this day, when we share the heartbeat of Jesus, who calls us with renewed strength, the four movements of the Spirituality of the Heart continue to offer light and direction to our missionary identity:

**Encounter:** with God, with ourselves, and with others—especially the excluded.

**Intimacy:** which grounds us in prayer, fraternal life, and deep trust.

**Conversion:** which frees us from fear and selfishness to open us to the Kingdom.

**Mission:** which sends us to love without borders, with passion and tenderness, with our feet on the ground, and with our hearts in God.

This Feast of the Sacred Heart is not merely a devotion: it is an urgent invitation to renew our way of being, to examine our prophetic choices, and not to fear the necessary changes. Every community, every confrère, is called to be a sign of the merciful love of the Heart of Jesus wherever we are.

I invite you to celebrate this day with imagination, with a solidarity that is joyful and incarnate, with living hope, and with a depth that springs from the heart. I am confident you will live it prayerfully and with a shared fraternity. May we willingly embrace both the intimacy of our common MSC life and the intimacy of our journey together with the People of God. Let us proclaim once again with conviction: *"Here I am, Lord, to be your Heart in the world"*.

I hold each of you in my heart with deep gratitude. I especially entrust those facing illness, solitude, or challenging missions to the Heart of Christ, the wellspring of consolation and hope. In that same gesture of faith, we place our missionary life into the hands of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart: may she continue to teach us how to trust, how to walk with courage, and how to carry within the depths of our story, the faithful love of her Son.

Fraternally in the Heart of Jesus,

Abzalón Alvarado, MSC [Auth.]

Chris Chaplin, MSC [Ed.]

Simón Lumpini, MSC

Bram Tulusan, MSC

Gene Pejo, MSC



MSC General Leadership Team.

## R. D. OF CONGO

The first accompaniment trip for the entire General Leadership Team (GLT) is scheduled to Union African-Franco Phone (UAF) from February 10 to March 4, 2025. All members of the GLT are to travel to Africa, except for one who is indisposed due to health reasons. I was paired with Bram Tulusan, MSC, to travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo. We arrived in Kinshasa on the afternoon of February 11, 2025. We immediately prepared ourselves for a trip the following day to two far-flung places, Tshuapa and Mbandaka. We were divided into two teams. Bram was with the District Superior Antoine, and I was with Dieder, one of the District Council members. Bram and his team will go to Tshuapa, and my team will go to Mbandaka. Both of our flights were scheduled to depart at 8:30 in the morning; however, due to the storm that hit the city for most of the morning, our team was able to board the plane and take off at exactly 2:30 p.m. It was unfortunate for Bram's team because they waited and waited until late afternoon, only

to be told that their flight had been cancelled and rescheduled for the following day. We were not surprised by the experience because we had been informed in advance that such experiences were not uncommon.

As soon as our team arrived in Mbandaka, we settled in Bamanya, and the following day, I met with the 4 MSC Aspirants. The encounter involved sharing their background, how they came to know the MSCs, and their motivation for joining the MSC. Dieder served as my interpreter since I could not speak French. It is inspiring to meet the young candidates and see the future of the MSCs in them.

Then we travelled to Mbandaka proper to St. Joseph Parish, where I had the chance to meet our three confreres who are working as a team. I also met the confreres who were living in a community house in a place they called the Beach. It is a riverbank of the gigantic Congo River where boats from neighbouring places would dock. The individual meeting was an opportunity to listen to their stories, their experiences, hopes, and aspirations as members of the MSC community, as well as their dreams for the future. This time I did not have an interpreter, except for one, since all of them can speak English very well. I







stayed in Mbandaka from February 13 to 18, 2025, and had the opportunity to listen to all six confreres who are stationed there, as well as one who was on vacation from his studies in Belgium.

We flew back to Kinshasa on February 19, 2025, but not without glitches. There were some tense moments during the pre-departure process, including being barred from entering despite having all the valid documents, and people approaching aggressively to ask for money. The final incident was that we had already boarded the plane and were preparing to take off, only to be told to disembark for unclear reasons. We were able to procure an alternative ticket for the plane, which would depart two hours after our original flight. We arrived in Kinshasa on the same date, safe and sound.

I don't have firsthand experience of what Bram Tulosan, MSC, went through, except for the occasional updates he sent to our WhatsApp chat group. He said that he was able to meet individually the MSCs in the places of Boende, Bokungu, and Mondombe. He said he had to endure riding the motorbike for a total of fourteen hours before reaching his destinations, wading or crossing rivers on small boats. All he could say was that it was worth the long trip to have the opportunity to encounter our confreres in their respective mission areas.

Both Bram and I arrived back in Kinshasa on February 19, 2025. In the District House, where we met Abzalón, who arrived the day before and was preparing for his trip to Mbandaka the following day. Abzalón will travel to Mbandaka to visit the communities that I visited over the last five days. February 20 was a rest day for us.

The following day, we travelled to Kimwenza to be with the students in the Pre-Novitiate. Twenty-one students are studying Philosophy and are preparing for their Novitiate formation. We spent time with the students in different batches, and Bram facilitated the sharing, which ranged from their views on religious life to answering questions about the Congregation. It was an inspiring experience to see that, on this side of the world, where the MSCs are lo-

cated, a good number of candidates are joining our Congregation. We also spent time with the two Formators who were responsible for the students' formation.

In Kinshasa, we visited four MSC Communities and spoke individually with fifteen MSCs working in various apostolates in Kinshasa and its neighbouring areas. Three MSCs from Brazzaville, Congo, visited, and we had the opportunity to speak with them individually. There were two who came and preferred to talk with Abzalón personally. In general, our conversation with the MSCs is centred around their experiences as MSCs, their joys and struggles, hopes and dreams for their community, the District, and the Union as a whole. We observed the immense commitment of our confreres to work in their respective mission areas, despite the limited resources. There is a deep-seated longing for growth and improvement, particularly in the various aspects of religious life, including governance and leadership. We also made consultations for the new Union Superior by giving them a piece of paper on which they wrote their first and second priority choices.

I also had the chance to meet two groups of the Chevalier Lay Associates (Confraternity of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart), one in Mbandaka and the other in Kinshasa. They have been organised for a long time and have been involved in various activities in the MSC Parishes. I was amazed by their collective commitment. They expressed their desire to establish a line of communication with the Lay Leadership as a whole, as well as with the various Chevalier lay groups worldwide.

We visited five FDNSC Communities, three in Mbandaka, and two in Kinshasa. The family spirit between the Congregations is awe-inspiring. We were received warmly and had some informal sharing.

On behalf of the General Leadership Team, I would like to thank the confreres in the Congo district and the district leadership team for facilitating our visit to the various communities and attending to our needs. We experienced the MSC hospitality that is very inherent in our charism as a Congregation. Thank you very much!

**Gene Pejo, MSC (Philippines)**



# BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS, AND FRANCE

Our journey through Belgium, the Netherlands, and France provided us with a profound opportunity to accompany our Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) confreres in their daily lives and ministries. This experience not only offered insight into the rich diversity of community life but also encouraged a reflection on the enduring spirit of service that defines the MSC mission.

## Belgium

Our accompaniment began in Brussels. Upon arrival, we encountered a noticeable chill in the air, a sign that winter had not yet yielded to spring. Despite the cold, the welcome we received from the community was heartening. Confreres like Celestin Ikakala, Hugo Vangel, Fernand Mahoungou, and Lazare Elenge generously introduced us to their daily work and vibrant parish ministries. Their service to the faithful extended beyond the church walls, as we witnessed firsthand during a moving experience—joining volunteers in a free breakfast program for those in need. This act of love and solidarity with the poor reminded us of a profound truth shared during our conversations: caring for the marginalized is at the very heart of the MSC

congregation's original mission. It was a moment of spiritual reflection that underscored the deep faith and compassion animating their ministry.

From Brussels, we continued our journey to Antwerp. We started with a visit to the MSC Belgian Provincial House for afternoon tea, followed by a trip to the International Community of Belgium (ICB). There, we were warmly welcomed by Martin Eloundou, Epeli Lutua, and Mark van Beeumen. Our evening included a delightful dinner prepared by the community, and later, a joyful moment watching the Champions League semi-final together. This community is engaged in both parochial and categorical ministries. Their categorical outreach is particularly noteworthy: they operate a free lunch program for the poor and refugees, and actively support the elderly. These efforts fall under what they call a “pastoral presence”—a mission to make the Church visible and relevant in the wider society. We departed with hope that this international community would remain sustainable and continue to thrive.

Next, we visited communities in Borgerhout, Rumst, and Asse. At the Provincial House in Borgerhout, we met Bart Devos, Anre Claessens, Oscar Vermeir, Robert Erken, Herman Van Dijck, Marcel De Pauw, and Jean de Nil. The visits to the Rumst and Asse communities provided a different yet equally enriching perspective. Many confreres in these communities are elderly and reside in nursing homes alongside members of other religious groups. Despite health challenges, they remain committed to service in whatever capacity they can—especially within parish







life. They generously shared stories from their missionary pasts, particularly their experiences in Congo, which had clearly made a lasting impact. Their wisdom and perseverance were profoundly moving, a testament to a life fully dedicated to others.

### The Netherlands

From Borgerhout, we travelled with Andre Claessens to Tilburg in the Netherlands. Following a structural reorganisation last year, the Dutch MSC province is now under the administration of the generalate house. We were welcomed at the Notre Dame community by Hans Kwakman. This facility also houses senior members of the OLSH sisters, and we observed the fruitful cooperation between the two groups.

Despite their age, many confreres remain active in both parish and social ministries. We visited VAI (Vraag and Aanbod International), guided by Theo te Wierik. VAI supports individuals in becoming self-reliant through practical tools, guidance, and training. Another visit, with Anton Egging and Jan van der Zandt, introduced us to MST (Mission Sociale Tilburg), a group that offers language courses, counselling services, and job-search support to vulnerable populations, along with regular meals for those in need.

A meeting with the community revealed a blend of encouragement and concern. While the community continues to make meaningful contributions to society, the closure of the international community in Tilburg has left a sense of loss and highlighted the urgent need for regeneration and continuity in MSC mission work. During our time in the area, we also visited Stein and the Shrine of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Sittard—both steeped in MSC heritage.

### France

From Tilburg, we traveled by train to Issoudun, via Antwerp. We stayed for several days, visiting local communities and learning about their work. In Le Blanc, Gabriel

Naikoua and Pierre Wambo serve the parish and engage in creative farming—gardening and raising chickens, with produce shared with the community. In Orleans, we met Jean Claude, Lionel, and Louis Raymond, three senior confreres living a disciplined, prayer-centered life while continuing their parish ministry.

In Issoudun—the birthplace of the MSC congregation—we had a profound encounter with the international community members Gerard Blattman, Jean Noel Faye, Sebastian and Sumner. Their work is demanding yet deeply symbolic. Serving in Issoudun is a privilege, one that requires serious commitment to language and cultural integration. Their reflections on the need for new members highlighted both the spiritual significance and the practical challenges of continuing the mission in such an important location.

From there, we travelled with Daniel Augie to Marseille and Strasbourg. The Marseille MSCs (Gibert Bonemort, Regis Cuisinet, Pierre Bally, Francois, Jean Pierre Billy, Hilaire Pierre) live in a nursing home, much like their counterparts in Tilburg. It was here that we met Emile Michel, who, at 104 years old, remains a living symbol of MSC dedication. In Strasbourg, we met Louis Boschung, Jean Francois Thorigny, Andre Bohas, and Karl Elsener. They reside next to the former MSC scholasticate, which is now a state-owned school.

Our visit provided a broad and heartfelt perspective on the realities of MSC communities in Western Europe. From youthful energy to seasoned wisdom, from bustling city centres to contemplative rural outposts, the MSC spirit thrives in diverse forms. Categorical ministry—reaching out to the poor, the refugee, and the elderly—remains a strength. Yet, the pressing needs for regeneration, structural clarity, and sustainable community life continue to challenge us. Despite these concerns, the spirituality of presence—our call to be with the people in compassion and service—remains vibrant and powerful in every corner we visited.

**Simon Lumpini, MSC (Congo)**  
**Bram Tulusan, MSC (Indonesia)**



## SPAIN



---

## IRELAND



\* The reports on the accompaniment to Ireland and Spain will be published in the next edition of the General Bulletin.



## SOUTH GERMANY - AUSTRIA

As part of the GLT-ACOMP process, I had the opportunity to accompany the Province of South Germany–Austria, which includes communities in Slovakia, Austria, and southern Germany.

In Nitra, Slovakia, the presence of life and mission remains strong through the Lukov Dvor Spiritual Centre, which includes the Dom Srdca Ježišovo (House of the Heart of Jesus) and the Dom Kána (House of Cana). The centre offers spiritual retreats, formation courses, and personal accompaniment, integrating the human, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of life. It is a space where God's people find comfort, healing, and strength to rebuild themselves in an integral way. It is also a beautiful intercongregational experience: Fr. Tomasz Poterala, MSC, together with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, and a diocesan priest, form a living testimony of shared mission.

In Vienna, Fr. Markus Clemens, MSC, carries out a valuable ministry of psychological support for people in need. His work is a prophetic sign within the professional field, bringing together psychological care and spiritual depth in a truly integrated way.

In Birkeneck, Freising (Bavaria), you can feel the legacy of many years of MSC presence and missionary service. Today, it is home to a centre that supports vulnerable young people, offering them a safe space for education and personal development. There, I shared time with a group of confreres—most of them older—who continue to carry forward inspiring projects that support and animate the wider MSC Congregation.

We then travelled to the oasis of Steinerskirchen, a place of peace, contemplation, and sustainable living. The confreres there practice alternative agriculture and welcome a variety of groups who come to take part in different community-based programmes. It is a place that continues to inspire hope and communion with creation.

On the way back to Salzburg, we stopped at the Haus der Begegnung ("House of Encounter"), where Fr. Norbert Rutschmann, MSC, carries out his ministry. This centre promotes an integrated spirituality, where the human, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of life are woven together in a path of healing, discernment, and inner growth. Faithful to the charism of the Heart of Jesus, it is a space where people can encounter themselves, God, and others in an atmosphere of trust, deep listening, and openness to the Spirit. The centre also trains facilitators who accompany others through this same integrative vision of the Gospel and the human person.



Later, I visited the MSC communities in Salzburg and Freilassing. In both places, our confreres—including some retired—continue to give generously in service of the mission. These communities house the Provincial Administration, the Financial Office, and the Privatgymnasium der Herz-Jesu-Missionare, the Province's school. Through the presence of MSC members, diocesan priests in residence or formation, and the children, youth, families, and staff of the school, the charism and spirituality of the Heart are clearly alive and relevant today.

During my visit, I had the joy of taking part in the school's pilgrimage to Maria Kirchental. It was a deeply enriching experience of faith, accompaniment, and community. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Fr. Michael Huber (Provincial) and to all the confreres for their warm welcome and for making this accompaniment possible. This Province remains deeply connected to the life of the whole Congregation—not only through its generous support of projects around the world, but above all through the genuine interest it shows in the life and mission of the entire MSC family. **Abzalón Alvarado, MSC (Guatemala)**



# NORTHERN GERMANY

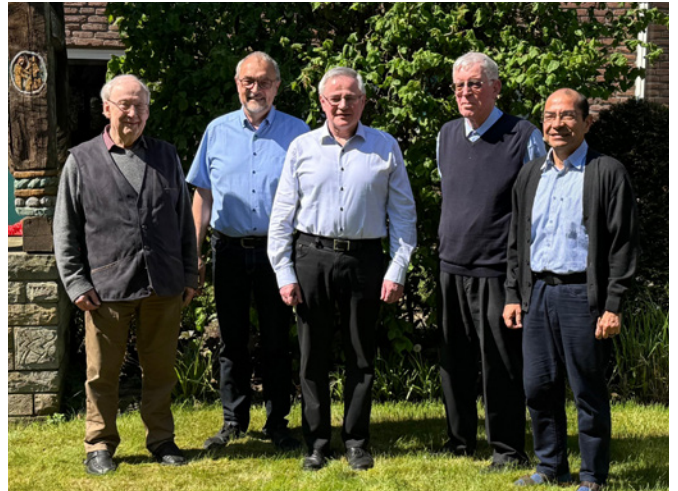
From April 28 to 30, 2025, the Provincial Chapter of the MSC Province of Northern Germany was held in Hilstrup. It was a time of attentive listening, communal discernment, and envisioning key projects for the future of this historic Province.

Today, the Province consists mainly of elderly confreres who have devoted their entire lives to the mission, both in Germany and in regions like Papua New Guinea and Peru. Throughout the history of our Congregation, this has been one of the most numerous and generous Provinces in contributing to the MSC mission globally.

For me, it was a valuable opportunity to listen deeply to the current historical moment experienced by our confreres in Hilstrup, as well as those in other parts of Germany. I was able to witness, with hope, that despite today's challenges, our confreres in the Northern German Province continue to believe in and build their future with faith and commitment.

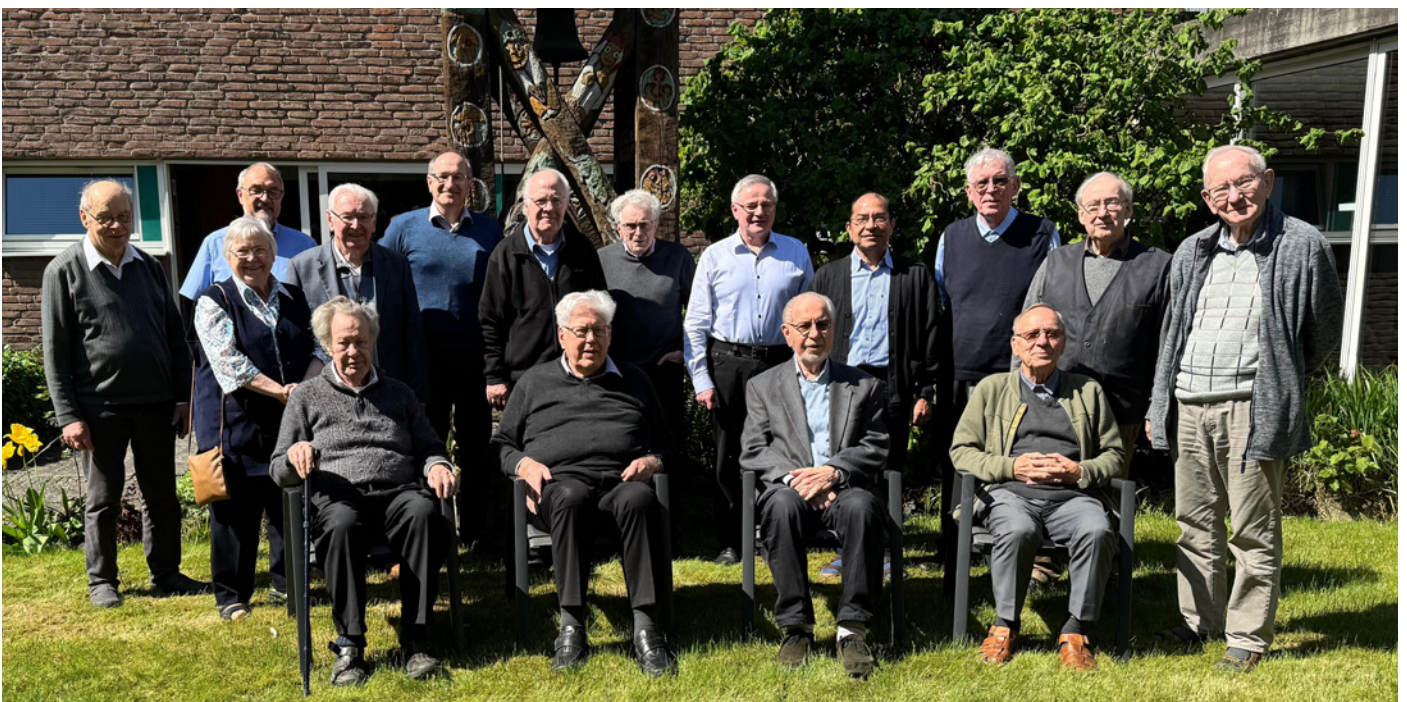
We trust that the renovation project for the Hilstrup House will be a genuine opportunity for the future of our dear MSC Entity in Northern Germany. We also hope that the presence of two MSC confreres from India, currently serving in the Diocese of Münster, will continue to be a vibrant and hope-filled expression of our MSC Charism and Mission.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Fr. Dieter Afhüppe for his three years of service as Provincial Superior. For the new triennium, Fr. Martin Kleer has graciously accepted the call to serve in Provincial leadership. Thank you, Martin, for



your openness and commitment to this mission. May we continue building strong channels of communication, and may hope keep rising in the heart of this Province.

**Abzalón Alvarado, MSC (Guatemala)**





# ANNUAL PEC MEETING

The annual meeting of PEC (The European Provincials' Conference) took place in a beautiful retreat house of the Presentation Sisters in central Ireland from 24 to 26 March 2025. It was the beginning of spring, and all around us, the daffodils and spring flowers were in bloom—a hopeful and encouraging sign for this meeting of the older Provinces of the Congregation as we discern together the future that the Lord has in mind for us and our Congregation in Europe. Many of the Provinces are deeply engaged in processes of completion and dying, but even in that reality, there is a strong spirit of hope, trust, mission, and brotherhood. Although Italy and the Netherlands are no longer provinces but are now communities under the Generalate, their superiors were invited to participate, which was greatly appreciated by everyone and was very important for the work of the meeting. Also in attendance were the Superior General, Fr Absalon Alvarado, the First Councillor, Fr. Chris Chaplin, and the Delegate of the General Administration for Europe, Fr Carl Tranter. We were greatly aided by the presence of two very capable translators: Jaime Rosique MSC and Roland Douchin.



In preparation for the meeting, each Provincial/Superior submitted a brief report on the life, activities, and planning in place in their Province/Community. This was translated and circulated to all participants prior to the meeting, allowing for substantial time for more personal sharing from each member during the opening sessions. Much of the meeting was spent reviewing the project's development to create an MSC Union for Europe. Carl Tranter reported on his visits and discussions with the leadership and members of each of the eight European provinces over the previous six months. Initially, four former Provinces will be the first to enter the Union when it is erected next year: Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Other Provinces in Europe will be able to join the

Union later, at a time that is right for each one, if they so choose. There was discussion about the way the Union will be structured, and Carl explained plans to work over the coming months on developing a vision for the Union and drafting a first set of Union Statutes. These plans will be presented to the General Conference in September.

During the rest of the meeting, time was devoted to reviewing the various mission projects of other entities of the Congregation in Europe, as well as the highly valued presence of many MSC from the entire Congregation who are on mission or studying in Europe. Chris Chaplin led a time of reflection on how PEC will eventually become the Territorial Body of Europe, as envisaged in our revised Constitutions. And the meeting reviewed preparations for a gathering of the younger MSCs living and working in Europe, which will take place in Issoudun in June. At the end of the meeting, Carl Tranter was elected as the Chair of PEC for the next two years, and André Claessens was elected as Secretary. Next year's meeting will take place in Salzburg, Austria, in March 2026.

In his words of encouragement to the meeting, Fr Absalon invited an alternative reading of the acronym PEC:

**“The P of Potentiality**, of life potential. In our Congregation in Europe, I see a lot of life potential. Even in a moment where, for many, this is the end of a way of MSC life, you remain a source of life. And I don't say this to please you nor because you are an economic power, but because, amid the processes we are living through in Europe, we will be called to live with freedom, and that will happen because there is LIFE.

**The E of Enthusiasm**. I deeply admire you, the leaders of Europe, because, coming from other parts of the world with equally urgent challenges, you have to be very enthusiastic to lead groups of older brothers and small spaces of mission, as we used to understand it. But just the fact of coming and continuing to be friends, of continuing to search together, is enthusiasm for me.

**The C of Creativity**. This historic moment for PEC definitely requires a transformation in our creative capacity. Without creativity, we can achieve very little.

And I see these three meanings of Life Potential, Enthusiasm, and Creativity in very concrete actions.

I thank you sincerely for being who you are, for continuing to be signs of MSC life.”

On the final day of the meeting, Fr. Joe McGee (Irish Provincial) arranged for the participants to visit a Celtic spirituality centre run by the Sisters of St. Brigid in St Brigid's native town of Kildare. This centre serves as a crossroads for inter-religious dialogue, offering an awareness of the cosmic and ecological dimensions inspired by St. Brigid of Ireland. It was an inspiring, refreshing and encouraging way to end our days together. **Carl Tranter, MSC (England)**

# *‘Dilexit Nos’ and Spirituality of the Heart*

On 24 October last year, Pope Francis, who passed away on Easter Monday, published his fourth encyclical entitled *Dilexit Nos*, *He Loved Us*. The subtitle reads ‘on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ’. In other words, it’s an encyclical about the Sacred Heart! This raises the question of why this Pope was so fascinated by this theme. That question is even more significant because we can view this encyclical as the Pope’s will; after all, it was his last major publication.

The encyclical was not received with much enthusiasm. It was described as philosophical and poetic, distinctly different from his earlier social encyclicals, such as *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*. An encyclical is a doctrinal document, making it a challenging read. If you delve into this text, you’ll find that it establishes a solid foundation for his previously published encyclicals.

It should be noted that the Pope did not conceive the subject of this encyclical himself. The fact that Pope Francis was originally a Jesuit holds significant importance here. The Jesuits have strongly promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart over the past centuries. The Pope also makes his Jesuit roots and spirituality evident and palpable in *Dilexit Nos*. Let’s see what the Pope has to say to us in this encyclical: I will outline some main points.

**The heart is a universal symbol.** If you stroll through a forest, you may sometimes spot a heart carved into a tree. Occasionally, an arrow pierces it, or two names are inscribed beside it. We all know it isn’t about the organ ticking in our body. No, it signifies the love that has touched two individuals to the core of their being. The heart, then, represents the centre of our lives, where soul and body create a unity that makes our lives genuinely worth living. It relates to our thoughts and feelings, guiding our actions, and is referred to as the place where our conscience and desires reside. Consider, for example, the words of the two disciples at Emmaus: ‘Did not our hearts burn within us as He spoke to us on the road?’ It’s worth noting that there are all sorts of proverbs where the heart is central: What the heart is full of..., having lost his heart..., following your heart. This always points to the essence of your existence. Thus, the heart is understood as a symbol, a visible sign of an invisible, deeper reality.

And then there’s a warning from the Pope, because in today’s hectic society, one runs the risk of losing one’s heart, one’s centre, in a heartless world (17) – a world that focuses on individualism and is fragmented by various technological developments. Don’t be fooled, says the Pope; follow your heart and be yourself, and then the challenge arises. Let love define your life (23).

The Dutch Catholic News Agency referred to the encyclical *Dilexit Nos* as the papal ‘counter-movement’ of the Sacred Heart. A faithful counter-movement exists in a heartless world because, in life, everything culminates in love, which clarifies for us the why and what we live for. That is precisely why we can experience God with our hearts. Then the encyclical (30) says: “Let us go to the Heart of Christ, the centre of his being, which is a burning hearth of divine and human love and which is the greatest fullness the human being can achieve. In that Heart we ultimately learn to know ourselves and learn to love.” That is what this encyclical is all about.

The Bible often discusses the heart, the core of our human existence. Father Jan Bovenmars, a Dutch missionary of the Sacred Heart, has discovered that the word “heart” appears 1,163 times throughout the entire Bible. It occurs most frequently, 403 times, in Wisdom literature, and 392 times it refers to the hearts of people. In the Bible, the heart is primarily the source of wisdom and the seat of our conscience. Essentially, we use our hearts to seek what truly matters in our lives, making fundamental choices, including the choice for or against God.

**A sign of love.** The first chapter of the encyclical serves as an introduction, while the second chapter focuses

---

*In the gospels, Jesus is consistently portrayed as a man with a heart, constantly engaging with people, healing and encouraging them, and loving them right up to the cross.*





fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy (12.10): they will look up to him whom they have pierced.

**The heart that has loved us so much.** Several church fathers and other authors of the time pondered the meaning of these biblical words, with Augustine being the foremost among them. Augustine is often depicted as a man holding a burning heart in his hand. This imagery refers to a passage in his *Confessions*: "You pierced my heart with your word and I loved you. You touched me and I came on fire for your peace". Loving Truth ignites the heart in his hand, and Augustine responds to God's love with unwavering commitment to the church. Invariably, the heart symbolises both human and divine love of Jesus, and the Lord's wounded side is seen as a source of grace or a call to an intimate encounter of love (78). Further on in the encyclical, it says: "Devotion to the Heart of Jesus is essential to our Christian life, insofar as it is an expression of our faithful and adoring openness to the mystery of the Lord's divine and human love, so that we(...) can say that the Sacred Heart is a synthesis of the Gospel (83). The heart of Jesus touches our heart and sets it ablaze, which evokes the image of the heart. However, it remains merely an image, and no one should feel obliged to see it as the core of our faith.

**Thirst for the love of God.** The encyclical outlines two fundamental aspects of the devotion to the Sacred Heart: a personal experience of trust in the infinite love and mercy of God, and a communal missionary commitment (91). Love is similar in that it is a deeply personal experience, but it is always directed outwards, into the world, towards others; thus, it must be translated into action. The encyclical features an extensive chapter detailing how various saints have expressed their devotion to the Sacred Heart in unique ways (102 ff.). Initially, during the Middle Ages, monasteries played a significant role in this devotion, but over time, the focus shifted to religious congregations (103). I mention the name of Johannes Eudes, a priest, theologian, and founder of congregations, who was first authorised to celebrate the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 1672. However, the most significant name belongs to the French nun, Margaret Maria Alacoque, who received apparitions of Jesus between 1673 and 1675, during which Jesus also revealed His heart. When Jesus showed her his heart, he said: This is the heart that has so loved men and spared nothing and went so far as to exhaust itself and be consumed to bear witness to his love before him (119-124). What's important here is the role of the Jesuit order, particularly Claude de la Colombière, who was Margaret Mary's spiritual director, supporting her in every way and further spreading her devotion. Moreover, he linked the apparitions of Margaret Mary with the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius (143 BC); succinctly, the Jesuits played a significant role in promoting the devotion of the Sacred Heart.

on the Heart of Jesus. This heart is the living core of the Church's initial proclamation. Therein lies the origin of our faith (32). In the gospels, Jesus is consistently portrayed as a man with a heart, constantly engaging with people, healing and encouraging them, and loving them right up to the cross. This is beautifully expressed in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me all you who are exhausted and burdened, and I will give you rest and relief. Take my yoke on your shoulders and learn from me: I am gentle and humble of heart." The Sacred Heart devotion that arose from within the church is not, of course, the worship of a part of Jesus' body, despite how visible that heart appears in all the Sacred Heart images. This has consequently led to numerous misunderstandings over the centuries.

But the whole Christ is depicted in an image of Him. 'The heart of flesh is the image of the most intimate centre of the Son become man and of His divine and human love, the symbol of His immense love' (48). To worship the heart of Jesus, therefore, means to worship Christ Himself. Worshipping the heart without the image of Christ behind it is, in fact, unthinkable. There are two texts from John's Gospel that truly underpin the entire Sacred Heart worship. I will mention them briefly:

In John 7 (37-39), Jesus says: "Let whoever is thirsty come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will flow from the heart of whoever believes in me, Scripture says. By this he was referring to the Spirit they would receive." And in John 19:33-34, a soldier thrust a lance into the side of the dead Jesus, and 'immediately blood and water came out.' Later, this water is linked to the water of baptism and the forgiveness of sins, while the blood refers to the blood that Jesus shed as a sign of the new covenant. In images of the heart of Jesus, we see it pierced. This serves as a

What was the significance of this devotion? Briefly, it bolstered the emotional and human elements of faith during the Jansenist period, which was marked by an intense focus on asceticism and a grim worldview. Moreover, during the 17th century, the era of rationalism, this devotion surfaced as a counter-movement, enabling ordinary people to connect with it as well. Consequently, the Sacred Heart devotion—unlike in previous centuries—experienced significant growth as a popular devotion.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart thrived in eighteenth-century France; however, the French Revolution effectively prohibited all ecclesiastical expressions. After the Battle of Waterloo and Napoleon's defeat, devotion to the Sacred Heart flourished not only in France but also throughout Europe, symbolising the ecclesiastical revival that followed the French Revolution. In 1856, Pope Pius IX declared the Feast of the Sacred Heart a celebration for the global church, and in the Netherlands, many homes and churches prominently displayed the Sacred Heart statue. The Sacred Heart became a symbol of the renewed ecclesiastical fervour of the era.

Remarkably, the Sacred Heart devotion inspired numerous missionary activities (150), including the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, a congregation established in 1853. The Sacred Heart was central, not only as a devotion to remember Jesus for all the suffering he endured for our sake but also as a prayer for the salvation of sinners. The founder of the congregation viewed the Sacred Heart devotion as a remedy for the ills of his time, primarily identifying these as selfishness, materialism, and religious indifference. Furthermore, he believed that it was not just the religious who needed to raise a counter voice in the world; he actually regarded this primarily as a task for the laity.

Later, the Pope expressed it this way: the Gospel, in its various aspects, must not only be contemplated or mentioned but also lived out, both through acts of love and in inner experience. This is especially true regarding the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection (156).

**Giving love, receiving love.** The last chapter of an encyclical is typically practical, and this encyclical is no different. It is not just about loving the Heart of Jesus; it also involves responding to that love (166). The subsequent paragraph of the encyclical is titled 'Continuing his love to the brothers and sisters', which echoes Francis' own tone. We are frequently reminded of this in the Gospel; in fact, it expands on the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves (167). A bit further on, it states: 'Love for brothers and sisters is not made, it is not the result of a natural effort of strength on our part, but it requires a change of our selfish heart' (168). And later adds: Mission, understood from the perspective of radiating the love of the Heart of Christ, calls for missionaries who are in love and still enamoured with Christ and who cannot help but pass on this love that has changed their lives. In



a final paragraph, it is stated that this mission to share Christ would only be something between me and Him. Mission is lived out in communion with one's own community and with the church. If we distance ourselves from the community, we also distance ourselves from Jesus (212). There is no distinction between serving the community and serving Jesus. After all, all that we have done for the least of our brothers we have done for Him (Matt 25:40) (213). Jesus sends you out to spread goodness, and He prompts you from within. Therefore, He calls you with a vocation to service. We want to be led by Him because He has said that He will be with us until the consummation of the world (215).

**Final.** In conclusion, the Pope states, "This document helps us to discover that what is contained in the social encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* is not alien to our encounter with the love of Jesus Christ, because when we lavish ourselves on this love, we are able to establish fraternal ties, to recognise the dignity of every human being and to take care together of our common home (217). Christ's love is outside the perverse cog of money and power, of entertaining and consuming; He alone can free us from this fever in which there is no more room for disinterested love. He is able to give a heart to this earth and reinvent love there, where we think the ability to love has died forever (218)."

My conclusion after reading this encyclical is that the text is quite comprehensive and wide-ranging. In fact, the entire history of the Church regarding the theme of the Heart of Jesus is discussed. Importantly, this piece underpins the Pope's social encyclicals as well as many other writings. In doing so, the Pope effectively utilises what he received from the Jesuit circle. On several occasions, he emphasises that we should not be blinded by that heart so prominently displayed on Sacred Heart statues. Within the Church and our world, the heart represents love and a commitment to our fellow human beings and society. The Pope believes that our society is often lacking in compassion; therefore, the Church should be a community of love, capable of renewing the world, inspired by the spiritual power of Jesus.

**Jos Vriesema, LCF (Netherlands)**



# *Spirituality of the heart as an urgent and necessary path*

The era in which we live is marked by noise, acceleration and dispersion. The human heart seems torn between multiple external demands and an inner emptiness that is difficult to name. Faced with this situation, the spirituality of the heart appears to be an urgent and necessary path: it refocuses human beings on what is essential, reminding them that deep down, something calls them to live, to love and to connect with others. The spirituality of the heart is an act of resistance. It invites us to slow down, listen to the silence and cultivate compassion. It offers a gentle but radical revolution: that of choosing kindness over judgement, interiority over dispersion, relationship over domination.

God loves us first, with a love that is unconditional, and creative. It surpasses all merit, all conscience, all human response. It is, as St. Paul says, 'poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). This love is the foundation of Christian spirituality: we do not become saints to be loved; rather, we accept being loved and that love leads calls us to sanctity.

Living the spirituality of the heart today does not mean distancing oneself from the world but entering it in a different way. It means looking at events, people and oneself with a penetrating gaze. It means living from a unified, silent center where God dwells. This spirituality is embodied in concrete life: in the way we listen to others, go through trials, love without possessing, and pray in secret.

Today, following Christ means entering this dynamic of the heart: learning to love truly, to welcome our wounds

and weaknesses, to let God touch them. It means making our hearts places of hospitality, listening and communion. It means believing that even in a harsh, closed world, love can still spring from an open heart.

The spirituality of the heart is not proclaimed, it is lived. It is manifested in simple gestures: a sincere look at our brothers and sisters, a shared silence, a word of comfort. It reminds us that world peace begins with inner peace, and that this peace can only come about if we have the courage to descend into the sanctuary of the heart.

Similarly, the Bible affirms that 'the word of God is alive and effective [...] it can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb 4:12). It thus speaks to us of a center, the heart, which lies behind all appearances, even behind the superficial thoughts that deceive us. The disciples of Emmaus, in their mysterious journey with the risen Christ, experienced a moment of anguish, confusion, despair and disillusionment. But beyond and despite everything, something was happening deep within them: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the way?' (Lk 24:32). (Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos* §4). The summit of this spirituality of the heart is revealed in the Heart of Christ, pierced on the Cross (Jn 19:34). This gesture becomes the visible sign of invisible love. Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque received this revelation: 'Behold this Heart which has loved men so much...' And today, the Church, through devotion to the Sacred Heart, recognizes here the theological symbol of Christ's saving love. The Catechism expresses it thus: 'He loved us with a human heart' (CCC §478). The spirituality of the heart is not only interior: it leads to mission. Pope Benedict XVI, of blessed memory, in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), emphasizes that spiritual life cannot be separated from active charity: 'God's love for us is a call to active love of neighbour.' (§14) The biblical phrase 'Dilexit nos' ('He loved us first') (1 Jn 4:19) takes on prophetic force today. It affirms that love cannot be conquered: it is received. It shows us that the source of all inner transformation is not moral performance, but the acceptance of a first, gratuitous, inexhaustible love.

*Dilexit nos* is therefore the root of a spirituality of the heart that is theologically grounded: the human heart becomes the place where God's love is welcomed, contemplated, internalized and then reflected in charity. The heart is not turned in on itself, but towards the Other and others, in a movement of communion.



This is why a heart touched by *Dilexit nos* becomes a heart sent forth. Christ sends his disciples with this message: ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ (Jn 20:21). The spirituality of the heart then becomes for us the driving force of a life of compassion, justice and unity in the Church, the family of God.

Today, this spirituality is also expressed in a fraternal, humble and joyful community life, where each one is called to love his brother as Christ loved us. It urges us to go out of ourselves to meet others, on mission, with a heart that is open, welcoming and merciful. In this way, we become living witnesses to this unconditional love that heals, lifts up and gi-

ves meaning to all life. To live *Dilexit nos* is to allow oneself to be transformed by this love, and then to embody it in concrete gestures of compassion, reconciliation and solidarity, especially towards the poorest, the vulnerable, the marginalized and those wounded by life.

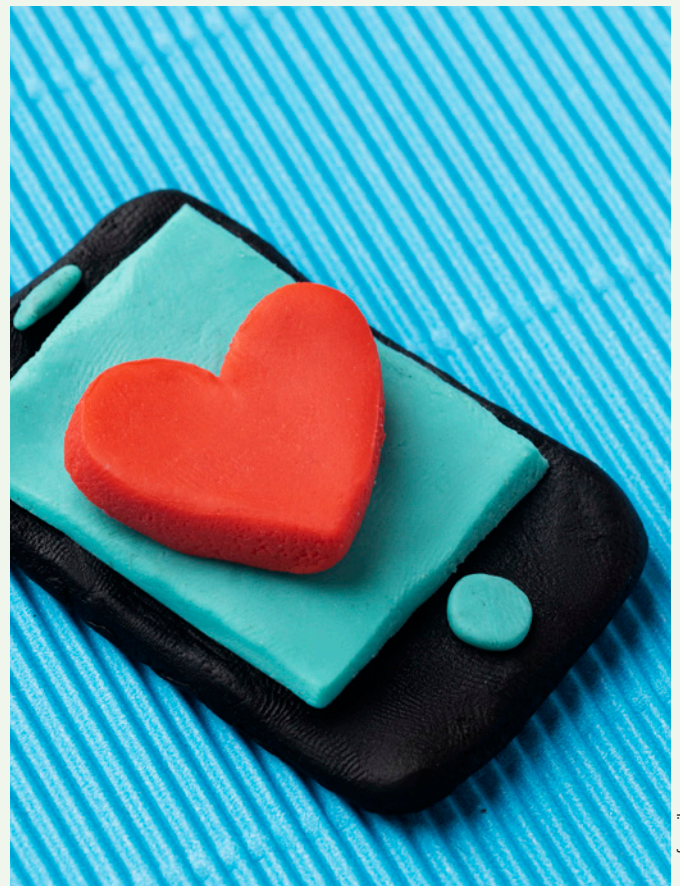
Living the spirituality of the heart and *Dilexit nos* means entering each day into the mystery of the love of “Christ who loved us” (Eph 5:2). This unconditional love becomes at once source, model, and mission. It begins with an interior life nourished by prayer, adoration and contemplation of the pierced Heart, sign of God’s total love for humanity.

**Simon Lumpini, MSC (Congo)**

## *Reintroducing the Heart of Jesus*

On 24 October 2024, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, published his fourth Encyclical, entitled *Dilexit Nos*. Pope Francis aims to make known the Heart of Christ, given that many distortions have spread. The focus of the text is to reaffirm that God loved us with a human heart. We believe that this centrality of the human heart of Jesus is deeply connected to the spirituality of the Heart in *Dilexit Nos* and that proposed by Fr. Júlio Chevalier, who also urged us to realise how God loved us with a human heart. The Encyclical seeks to refocus the heart on spirituality, not from a superficial perspective, but as the vital centre of existence and human relationships (DN, n. 1-3), considering the power of love that is reported in the quotations that the Encyclical brings in its first number (cf. Rom 8:37; Rom 8:38; Jn 15:9, 12; Jn 15:15; 1 Jn 4:10; 1 Jn 4:16), by showing how God loved us, not formally or ceremonially, nor in a commercial dynamic, but out of pure gratuitousness (His open heart precedes us and waits for us unconditionally, without demanding any prerequisite for loving us and offering us his friendship, DN, n. 1). *Dilexit Nos* strives throughout the text to make this gratuitousness clear, for it seems that it is by restoring this precious gratuitousness that we can arrive at a spirituality of the Heart that is neither superficial nor commercial.

In the section on returning to the Heart (DN, n. 9-16), drawing on the Polish philosopher Bauman’s concept of the ‘liquid world,’ Pope Francis expresses concern about a heartless world where relationships are volatile, affections are fluid and unanchored, and the world claims to be rational but is in fact satisfied by deviations from virtue. This risk is amplified in the world of algorithms, which seem to mirror all relationships. Through what algorithms show us, we may assume that our worldview is the only one possible, which is a paradox of the liquid world. The Pope tells



us, ‘The algorithm that operates in the digital world shows that our thoughts and decisions are much more ‘standard’ than we thought. They are easily predictable and manipulable. This is not the case with the heart’ (DN, n. 14). To restore the centrality of the Heart is to correct such erroneous tendencies present in contemporary society.



In a fragmented society, the heart is the place to restore unity (DN, n. 21), which is why the Heart of Jesus is the image of the union of the Heart of God with the human heart. It is capable of unifying history and people. It is in this perspective that Francis takes up the teaching on the Heart of Jesus (DN, n. 24-27), through St. Ignatius, St. Bonaventure, and other Church figures. Returning to Sacred Scripture, the feelings of the Heart of Christ are present in his gaze, in his words and his gestures (DN, n. 32-47). Not separating the heart from the person is an effort of the Encyclical.

Devotion to the Heart of Christ is not the worship of an organ separate from the Person of Jesus. What we contemplate and adore is Jesus Christ in his entirety, the Son of God made man, represented in an image of himself in which his heart is highlighted. In this case, the heart of flesh is understood as an image or privileged sign of the most intimate centre of the incarnate Son and of his love, which is at once divine and human, because, more than any other member of his body, it is 'the natural index or symbol of his immense charity' (DN, n. 48)

The Heart of Jesus is not just an organ, but the centre of his person.

---

*The Pope tells us, 'The algorithm that operates in the digital world shows that our thoughts and decisions are much more 'standard' than we thought. They are easily predictable and manipulable. This is not the case with the heart' (DN, n. 14).*

When we worship the Heart of Jesus, we worship the person of Jesus. On this theme, as on others that we could list, Pope Francis and Jules Chevalier converge, for the heart is the whole person of Jesus, as it is for us. Still, in Jesus, the Son of the living God, it reflects the unity between Jesus and the Father and the unity between Jesus and the human race. From this theology emerges a spirituality centred on the unification of the person with God and with humanity, to the point that a missionary congregation of such spirituality is born. Cuskelly tells us about Chevalier's spirituality:

Júlio Chevalier had learned to turn his gaze constantly to Jesus 'who brings our faith to completion'. He had learned to admire Christ as the 'splendour of God's glory and the perfect expression of his nature'. But it was only then that he learned that the nature of God is love. It was only then, through his devotion to the Sacred Heart, that he learned that 'this only Son, begotten from all eternity by the Heart of God the Father, is the radiance of his charity among men' (Cuskelly, p. 115)

If Pope Francis aimed to reintroduce the Heart of Jesus and devotion to it in our time, the same can be said for Fr. Jules Chevalier, who regarded the Heart of Christ as the remedy for humanity's ills. Chevalier believed that the evils of humanity could be resolved through the discovery of the Heart of Jesus (Cuskelly, p. 113), as the Heart, filled with love and mercy, restores life and grace to people. The Encyclical *Dilexit nos* provides us with some insights that it also seeks to address evils, including what we might term neo-Jansenism and disembodied spiritualities, akin to neo-Gnosticism.

It could be said that today, more than Jansenism, we are facing a strong advance of secularisation that aims at a world free of God. Added to this is the proliferation in society of various forms of religiosity without reference to a personal relationship with a God of love, which are new manifestations of a 'spirituality without flesh'. This is real. However, I must warn that, within the Church itself, the harmful Jansenist dualism has been reborn with new faces. It has gained renewed strength in recent decades, but it is a manifestation of that Gnosticism which, in the early centuries of the Christian faith, damaged spirituality and ignored the truth of the 'salvation of the flesh'. For this reason, I turn my gaze to the Heart of Christ and invite you to renew this devotion. I hope that it will also appeal to today's sensibilities and thus help us to face these old and new dualisms, to which it offers an adequate response. (DN, n. 87)

God loved us with a human heart; this represents the convergence between *Dilexit nos* and Chevalier. From this affirmation arises our mission to make the Sacred Heart loved. From this assertion, we can see a remedy for the evils of humanity. Hence, there is an urgency in repositioning the heart and re-presenting the Heart of Christ as the unifying centre between men and humanity with God. This is our mission: to make the Sacred Heart of Jesus loved everywhere.

**Abimael Francisco do Nascimento, MSC (Brasil)**

# *He loved us... with a human heart*

Remembering Francis, and as this is the month of the Sacred Heart, we offer you a reflection on his fourth and final encyclical, 'Dilexit nos', and its relationship with the Spirituality of the Heart of our MSC charism.

With 'Dilexit nos', Francis continues his proposal of love for the earth and life, already expressed in the encyclicals 'Laudato si' and 'Fratelli tutti'. This new encyclical is a comprehensive explanation of the human and divine love that God shows us, which we define as the 'Sacred Heart of Jesus', something that, for us, members of a Congregation dedicated to this devotion, is an event that we cannot fail to celebrate and highlight.

**God loves with a human heart.** As the Pope suggests, we can emphasise that when we speak of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we are not talking about just another devotion, much less something outdated, belonging to a bygone era. A couple of centuries ago, there was indeed an extraordinary flowering of this title, adopted by many believers who wanted to live their faith or their special consecration under the protection of this definition, whose evolution is very well described in the encyclical. However, it also reminds us of its biblical origins and its profound theological interpretations, as well as the mystical development it has undergone in saints de-

voted to it and in the magisterium of the Church, which has consistently proposed it as a current of interior life and exterior action. Thus, the task of updating the term Heart of Jesus brings us back to the essence of the Gospel and of Revelation itself. For it reveals to us the very centre of God, who is Love, and that to know and experience him, we must love and do so in the same way that God loves us in Jesus Christ.

To recover the authentic meaning of what it means that God loves us with a heart that is both human and divine is to respond to the needs of a humanity as needy as those whom Jesus saw as lost, 'like sheep without a shepherd'.

**The relationship with his Mother.** To update this devotion means taking a leap into spirituality, as did the founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Julio Chevalier, who, concerned with responding to the physical and material needs of 19th-century society, proposed the Mother of the Lord as a model to imitate. He did not speak of devotion to the heart of Mary, but explained the special bond that existed between Mother and Son, from his conception to his death and resurrection. This bond united them both physically and spiritually, in heart, mind and action, making Mary not only the Mother and Teacher of her Son, but also his first disciple. To this end, he invited us to contemplate Mary as 'Our Lady of the Sacred Heart', the holder and model of the relationship with that Love of God, expressed in an image in which only the Heart of Jesus appears, since Mary's heart is also contained within it. And with a gesture on the part of the child that encourages those who look at the image to feel invited to reproduce the same thing in their lives: to merge into a communion of love and mission. The love that God pours out on us and that we, in turn, must bring to others in the evangelising mission entrusted to us by the Lord. A mission of service, healing, reparation and universal sacrifice, always for the benefit of suffering and needy humanity, which Fr. Chevalier carried out with the help of Our Lady and through various religious congregations and lay movements. Today, we can continue to discover and spread not just another devotion, but the Spirituality of the Heart — a relationship of love and service for the good of all those in need, whether they are victims of poverty, marginalisation, or hatred, nourished from the Heart of God.

---

*This bond (Mother and Son) united them both physically and spiritually, in heart, mind and action, making Mary not only the Mother and Teacher of her Son, but also his first disciple.*





**In the footsteps of Father Chevalier.** Following our founder, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart want to live the spirituality that emerges from a particular passage in the Gospel. It is the passage in which St. John describes how blood and water flowed from the pierced heart of Our Lord on the cross (Jn 19:31-37). Father Chevalier was greatly motivated by this image of Jesus Christ, who even after his death continues to give himself to those who martyred him. There is no response of complaint or vengeance in Jesus, just as there was none in his life when he received insults, but rather a gift of himself that will continue throughout the centuries. For the Jews of that time, blood was the receptacle of life, and water was the indispensable nourishment for sustaining it. It is a beautiful metaphor for understanding that in this detail highlighted by the evangelist, there is much more than the simple statement that he was dead. Father Chevalier understood this and invited us, his children, to realise it too. That is why we focus on this pas-

sage and transcend it to attain a spirituality that, in turn, transcends simple religion. People can become attached to a faith that is nothing more than the fulfilment of rules and precepts that impose few obligations and commit them to almost nothing. But the word and witness of Our Lord want to take us to a level that is far above mere fulfilment. Specifically, to merge with Jesus Christ in an embrace of intimacy, service, vital commitment and love with God the Father (Jn 17:11-26).

Surely this is how his mother Mary and his disciple John felt, both witnesses of the event and committed to bringing the fruit of that contemplation to all the other followers of the Lord, who, seeing him risen, came to understand that they had to preach not only words they had heard but a testimony offered until their last breath, in accordance with Jesus' manifest purpose of serving and giving his life. And that is where the MSC's ideal of service, dedication and love that transcends any reality springs from.

**From devotion to spirituality.** It is not just a matter of being good people, faithful believers, faithful observers of the commandments or seekers of a deserved heavenly reward. No. Jesus Christ has touched our hearts, and that is why we seek to feel and experience what his life and dedication were like, rather than just reasoning about what he proposes to us. This is a task reserved for those who see beyond religious observance and take the leap into the dimension of the Heart, that Heart of the Lord, open and devoted so that we may find in it the same shelter and comfort as well as the life and energy to act according to God's plan. And so we delve into the essence of the spirituality that is presented to us, focused on accepting and practising the will of God. The same will that inspired Jesus Christ and led him to dedicate himself to the needs of a suffering and oppressed humanity. This is the same will that should encourage us to set aside the ego of comfort and commit ourselves to a lifestyle akin to that of our Master. This gave rise to Fr. Chevalier's vocation and his desire to unite priests, religious, and laypeople in a common mission that seeks, like Jesus, to transform the world according to God's plan, through service and total dedication.

**Our moment.** It is the Spirituality of the Heart, born from the Heart of the crucified one and replicated in us who, like Mary and John, are witnesses and want to bring the greatness of this message to the whole world. That is why Chevalier's motto was: 'May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere', or in today's words: 'May everyone discover and share the Love of God'. This is our spirituality, and it is also our commitment to a society in need of understanding that God has loved it first and awaits our response (1 Jn 4:10-19).

**Chema Álvarez, MSC (Spain)**

# An Intense Year with Pope Francis



In January 2024, I arrived in Rome to join the team of a Vatican foundation that coordinates and animates a pontifical work globally: the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. I knew very little about it, and even less about the Pope himself.

Although he is a Jesuit, my encounters with Pope Francis were limited to his visit to Chile in 2018 and observing World Youth Days from afar. Everything I knew about him was filtered through his writings or media reports. I was also unfamiliar with the workings of the Vatican.

Over the past year, I had the privilege of meeting with him six times in private audiences, alongside the previous director or other members of the international team. These meetings took place in the Apostolic Palace, sometimes to coordinate his prayer intentions, introduce him to the foundation's members, or record footage for The Pope Video project.

He was always kind, approachable, and engaging. Upon arriving in his wheelchair, the first thing he did was greet everyone individually, not just generally. He knew the na-

mes of the cameramen and the situations of their families, and he always had a joke to lighten the atmosphere and foster connection.

He was very focused on his tasks, taking his prayer intentions seriously. They served as a way to connect with reality and help others understand it, moving us to address the significant challenges of humanity. He showed great interest in this apostolate. I had the opportunity to accompany him in global reflections on topics ranging from the role of women (April) to the mission of political leaders (August), supporting those who have lost a child (November), and addressing the plight of those fleeing their country (June). In short, he was deeply involved in everything.

This global prayer network was crucial for him. He understood from the start that nothing in the Church can progress without a personal, honest, and constant relationship with the Lord. In his own words: "prayer is the heart of the Church's mission." It involves exercising our baptismal priesthood by presenting the world's needs to God sincerely and profoundly.

This is precisely what we strive to promote in the PWPN. It's not just about naming monthly intentions or presenting them appealingly, but about learning to offer oneself daily in apostolic availability to collaborate with Christ's mission by doing our usual tasks with readiness and care for humanity's challenges. From him, I learned what it means to pray from the heart, in Jesus' Heart, and for the heart of the world. It's akin to what we express in the doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer: "through Christ, and with him, and in him..." Beyond any more or less pious practice, our mission is above all to help people pray in a way that transforms their lives. That is, entering so profoundly into the compassionate Heart of Jesus that our hearts become like His. We strive to achieve this through the ClickToPray platform, particularly through the retreats and formations of The Way of the Heart, our spiritual itinerary. We ask, as a song I have had the privilege of singing in Spanish says: "Jesus, teach me your way of helping others feel more human. May your steps be my steps, my way of proceeding." (Cfr. Tu modo). At the end of the year, he appointed me international director, always emphasising the importance of maintaining a sense of humour. He was tired, undoubtedly, but not depressed. During one of our conversations, as we transitioned the mission with the previous director, he requested a copy of *Gaudete et Exsultate* in Spanish. He handed it to me and said, "Go to note number 101. Please, read it aloud." It was a prayer by Saint Thomas More about the grace of living gratefully, enjoying jokes, and nourishing the body and soul with joy. I highly recommend it. It reflects his inner freedom despite the enormous weight of his mission, which we will never forget.

Links: [www.popesprayer.va](http://www.popesprayer.va) / [www.clicktopray.org](http://www.clicktopray.org) / [www.thepopevideo.org](http://www.thepopevideo.org)

**Fr. Cristóbal Fones, SJ (Chile)**

*International Director Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network*



# Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

## Rolling Away the Stones: An Easter Reflection for the MSC Family

On Easter Sunday, we, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart—religious and lay—rejoice not because we found answers in the tomb, but because we discovered He is not there. He has Risen! The empty tomb is not a void; it is a proclamation. It proclaims a love stronger than death, light breaking through darkness, and a Heart that beats again—for you, for me, for the world.

For those of us who live and breathe the Spirituality of the Heart, Easter is not just a celebration of Christ's triumph—it is a call to conversion. A call to let His Heart, pierced and now glorified, enter our own hearts more deeply, transforming everything that is hardened, closed, or weighed down.

### Easter Begins in Darkness

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark. Isn't that where resurrection begins? In the quiet darkness of grief, loss, and unknowing. In the confusion and weariness of daily mission. In the fatigue of community life. Yet even there, the stone was rolled away.



As we gather at the tomb with Mary, Peter, and John, we notice the first sign: the stone is gone. This powerful symbol reminds us that before the Risen Christ is revealed, something must be removed. Something heavy. Something final. Something that seemed immovable.

So today, as MSCs, let us ask:

What are the stones in our own hearts and lives that need to be rolled away—so we too can encounter the Risen One, and rise with Him in love, hope, and renewed mission? The Stones We Must Roll Away – As Missionaries of the Sacred Heart:

### 1. The Stone of Routine Without Passion

We risk becoming professionals of religious life—efficient but lukewarm. Easter invites us to rekindle the fire of our first love: a Heart on fire with zeal for God and compassion for people.

### 2. The Stone of Disconnectedness

Sometimes our hearts grow distant—from Jesus, from each other, from the people we serve. Heart Spirituality calls us back to intimacy: to know Jesus, to love Him personally, and to make Him known in every encounter.

### 3. The Stone of Individualism

Community is a gift, not a burden. Easter challenges us to move beyond isolated living and embrace a shared journey of vulnerability, fraternity, and mission.

### 4. The Stone of Wounded Relationships

Where there are divisions, misunderstandings, or old hurts between us, the Risen One brings healing. Let us have the bravery to forgive and seek reconciliation as members of one Heart.

### 5. The Stone of Clericalism or Superiority

As MSCs, we are not above others—we are among them, with them, for them. Easter invites us to humility and servant leadership, with the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus.

### 6. The Stone of Spiritual Emptiness

Ministry can drain us. Without regular contact with the Source, we risk burnout. The Resurrection is a call to return to the wellsprings: silence, adoration, contemplation—where His Heart speaks to ours.

### 7. The Stone of Injustice and Apathy

As followers of a Heart that suffers with humanity, we cannot be indifferent to the poor, the Earth, migrants, and the excluded. We are called to roll away the stone of comfort and respond with genuine compassion.

### 8. The Stone of Fear in the Face of the Future

Declining numbers, uncertainty in mission, personal anxieties—these tempt us to despair. But the Risen Lord whispers, “Do not be afraid.” His Heart still burns with love for this world, and He calls us to trust and go forward with courage.

### 9. The Stone of Isolation from the Laity

As MSCs, we are not alone in our mission. The Lay MSC family walks alongside us. Easter calls us to deeper collaboration, mutual respect, and shared formation—so that together, we may be a Heart of Christ in the world.

### 10. The Stone of War and Violence

In a world still torn by division, ethnic hatred, and geopolitical conflict, we as MSCs are called to be artisans of peace. The Heart of Jesus, pierced on the Cross, condemns

all violence. Easter calls us to beat our swords into ploughshares, and to preach peace with our lives.

### 11. The Stone of Ecological Destruction

Creation groans. Forests are razed, rivers are polluted, and the poor suffer most. As stewards of God's creation, we must rise to an Easter of ecological conversion. Our charism must echo *Laudato Si'*—to feel the wounds of the Earth in our hearts and respond with love and action.

### 12. The Stone of Digital Addiction and Distraction

Screens can consume us—stealing silence, community, depth, and divine connection. The Risen Christ calls us to unplug and reconnect to the Heart—through genuine pre-

sence, attentive listening, heartfelt prayer, and authentic communion with others.

### He Has Rolled Away the Stone

The good news is this: God has already rolled away the stone. Death has been defeated. Love has triumphed. The Sacred Heart, once broken, now beats with new life and mission. Let us not live as if the stone is still there. Let us not cling to the tomb. Instead, let us rise with Him—boldly, joyfully, tenderly. Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Let us rise with Him—together, as one MSC family.

**Thateus Darwin Francis, MSC (India)**

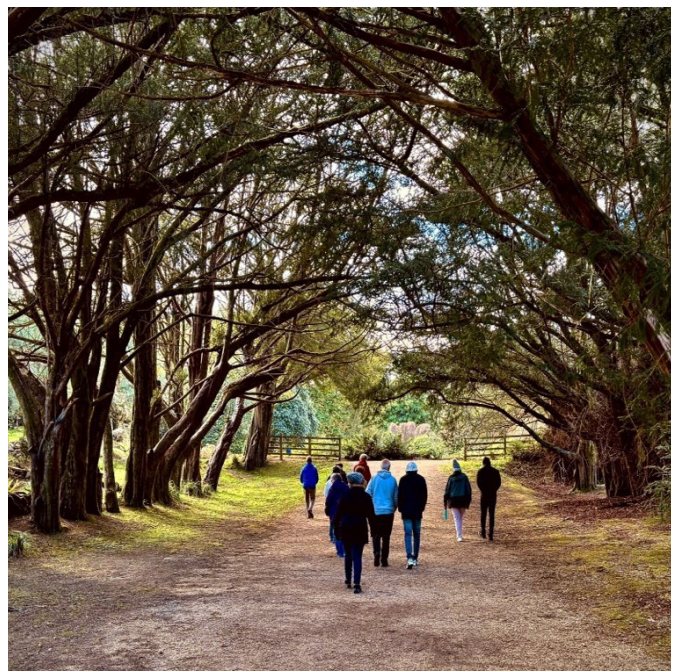
*Director- MSC Global Development Office, Rome.*

## *An Tairseach – a sabbatical for our time!*

A chance meeting with Timothy Radcliffe, OP, in early 2024, followed by a shared discussion on cosmology, led me to the door of An Tairseach, Ireland, for a ten-week sabbatical focused on cosmology and ecology, with our central text being *Laudato Si'*. An Tairseach (Gaelic for 'the threshold') was a vision of the Dominican sisters that emerged from their Chapter in 1992, aimed at establishing an organic farm on their 70 acres in Wicklow, south of Dublin, along with an ecology centre overlooking the Irish Sea. It encompasses the unfolding story of the universe, as documented by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry<sup>1</sup>, and in more recent times, Pope Francis' 2015 seminal encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The works of Teilhard de Chardin were also prominent, including "The Divine Milieu" and "The Phenomenon of Man." The 'threshold' reminds us that, in response to the looming environmental breakdown, humanity has the potential to create an ecological age and that we are, as Thomas Berry famously wrote, 'between two stories'.

The spring program included a total of sixteen participants, featuring a surprising mix of young and old, as well as lay and religious individuals from Australia, New Zealand, Malawi, Nigeria, the USA, and, of course, some locals. Each morning, we gathered in the cosmic garden for our morning prayer and ritual. A spiral is formed from bricks, each representing millions of years and culminating in 13.8 billion years since the great 'flaring forth' (Big Bang). At significant points in the unfolding story of the universe, rocks are placed, and it is astounding that in that visual image before us, Jesus was born a mere 2000 years ago!

The program's objective is to familiarise participants with our evolution over nearly 14 billion years, as discovered by contemporary science; to explore its implications for





understanding our place in the universe; to delve into the theological implications of this new cosmology; to listen to the mystics; to reflect on themes from the Celtic Tradition; to examine our images of God while critiquing our present world order; and to explore possibilities for a sustainable lifestyle. To help us engage with these objectives, the program is delivered through lectures led by the An Tairseach team and guest lecturers, including Diarmuid O'Murchu msc, Philip John Newell, Niamh Brennan, John Feehan, and others; art, movement, ritual, prayer, weekly cosmic walks in nature, yoga, walking the labyrinth; and visits to sacred places, such as Glendalough, the site of a medieval monastic community founded by St Kevin. John Feehan is an Irish geologist, botanist, author and broadcaster, and aside from being a member of the Royal Irish Academy, John was also one of Pope Francis' principal consultants on the topic of biodiversity for *Laudato Si'*.

We were fortunate to have John with us for several days, during which we explored the evolutionary geological history along the Irish Sea shoreline and delved into the science of botany using our electronic microscopes in the conference room. As a result, we gained an entirely new perspective on creation! Over the ten weeks, some of the topics presented included an introduction to the universe story; exploring our ecological footprint; theology in context; patriarchy; ecofeminism; cosmology; Celtic spirituality; biblical theology from an evolutionary viewpoint;



mysticism; *Laudato Si'* and Church teachings; creation, evolution and faith; incarnating the human; theological implications; action on climate justice; the Bible and ecology; and evolutionary theology and care for creation. During our ten weeks together, we developed a bond, and our weekly 'cosmic walks' in the stunning County Wicklow countryside were truly moments to cherish, as depicted in this photo, walking along an avenue of lime trees in the Killmacurragh National Botanical Gardens.

**John Walker, MSC (Australia)**

## Have a Voice



A pregnant woman knows that she has pain and suffering ahead of her, yet she goes through all this, facing her fears and anxieties, as she gives birth to a new life.

The Lord says to Paul, "Do not be afraid to speak out, nor allow yourself to be silenced: I am with you. I have so many people on my side in this city that no one will even attempt to hurt you." (Acts 18:9–10)

This divine assurance given to Paul in Corinth is not just ancient comfort—it is a living invitation for us today. In a world broken by war, where Gaza, Yemen, Ukraine, and

Goma bleed under relentless violence, we are tempted to feel helpless, silenced, or numb. But the Spirit whispers boldly: "Do not be afraid."

Courage is not the absence of fear—it is the decision to stand in love when fear says hide, to speak when injustice says be quiet. Spirit-led courage is not recklessness; it is bold faith rooted in God's presence and love for all people, especially the suffering.

To face today's challenges, we must first dare to listen deeply—to the screams of children buried under rubble, to the tears of bereft women, to the anguish of families ripped apart. And then, empowered by the Spirit, we speak out against violence, against indifference, and for peace. This is not just political advocacy; it is a Gospel imperative. The Spirit does not lead us to comfort but to compassion that costs something.

In a world that prefers weapons and retaliation, we call on leaders to choose life over domination, and demand that humanity, not power, guide politics.

The Spirit reminds us: You are not alone. Across cities, nations, and faiths, many hearts burn with the same hope for peace. We are called to be part of that communion of courage.

Let us not be silenced. Let us act, pray, advocate, and live in a way that interrupts the cycles of violence, with love.

**Chris Chaplin, MSC (Australia)**

# My great friend, the Pope

Father Paco, MSC, was a friend of Francis,  
and Father Ángel, OSA, is a friend of Leo XIV.

Those of us who have not had the good fortune to know the person behind the public figure, to know Francis as Jorge Mario Bergoglio or Pope Leo XIV as Roberto Prevost, have another blessing: we can talk to and listen to those who had or still have a close friendship with them.

The day after Leo XIV was elected Pope, Fr. José Manuel González Trobo, msc, forwarded me a WhatsApp message he had received that morning. 'I hope to have some time during the Archpriest meetings to tell you what the election of Pope Leo XIV, in the person of Robert Prevost, my great friend and Augustinian brother for 24 years, has meant to me.' The original message is from Fr. Ángel Camino, OSA, Episcopal Vicar of the Eighth Vicariate in the Archdiocese of Madrid, to which the MSC parish of San Federico belongs. I replied to Fr. José Manuel with a humorous comment: 'You're getting to know a lot of friends of Popes... heh, heh...' The fact is that Fr. Paco Blanco, msc, Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Spain, was also a friend of Pope Francis. They met when Fr. Paco was a missionary in Buenos Aires, in a 'shanty town' on the outskirts of the Argentine capital. It was one of the areas for which the then-Bishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio, later Pope Francis, was responsible as pastor of the diocese. He highlights 'his commitment as a pastor who was close and attentive to the community'. Without a doubt, a definition that also describes him as pontiff.

**Francis' "worn-out shoes."** Fr. Paco says he never saw him arrive at the parish by car. "We had a parish in the slum of Soldati, the first dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima in Buenos Aires. Bishop Bergoglio often visited us. He always arrived by bus or 'premetro'; I never saw him arrive in his official car. What's more, he didn't let anyone drive him to his residence. I even remember once when he felt unwell and had to go to the hospital. I offered to drive him, but he flatly refused. He only agreed to let me take him to the 'premetro' stop.' Have you seen the photo of the shoes that were placed on Francis' coffin? Fr. Paco says, 'I remember him, always with his worn-out shoes.'

He himself comments that 'Francisco has been very Bergoglio,' referencing the consistency of the Pope's decisions and gestures during his years as pontiff, continuing what he already did as bishop. Fr. Ángel speaks in the same terms, expressing the hope and conviction that 'Leo XIV will be very Roberto,' since 'it cannot be otherwise.'

**Always with the people.** Francis' decision to move to Santa Marta instead of staying in the Vatican was surprising, but



the fact is that in Argentina, as bishop, he also preferred to live in a residence with other priests. He liked contact with people and did not want his "position" to separate him from their daily reality. 'When he visited us in the slums, he asked about everyone. He remembered everything they had told him in previous conversations and was interested in those who were ill or suffering. He showed a great deal of interest, especially in migrants. There were many people from Bolivia and Paraguay in that area. He always went up to them to ask how they were,' says Fr. Paco.

Are we surprised now by his continued interest, as Pope, in the dignity of migrants, his welcome to exiles and his great sensitivity towards people living in refugee camps? It is not surprising that his first Apostolic Journey, one of the most widely publicised, was to Lampedusa. This is the place of arrival for hundreds of migrants who use this Italian region as a gateway to Europe from Africa.

On the other hand, you might recall his visits to prisons and the significant gesture of designating the gate of Rebibbia prison in Rome as one of the Holy Doors for this year's Jubilee. These were his answers to the disciples' questions: "When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" (Mt 25:38-39). He also did this as bishop.

**Leo XIV continues with his routines.** In the same vein, 'now, Roberto Prevost is Leo XIV, but he cannot do without his previous life,' says Fr. Angel. A very simple gesture. When he was appointed Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine, he suddenly disappeared, and no one knew where he was.



He went to Genazzano, to the shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel. They made him bishop and he went back to Genazzano. They elected him pope, and the next day, on Saturday, without saying anything, he asked the driver to take him 70 km from Rome to Genazzano. It was a private visit; all he wanted was to pray before the Virgin.'

**Another detail.** 'Pope Francis told him when he appointed him cardinal, "You live in the houses opposite the Vatican where the cardinals live". He left, but every day of the week, from Monday to Friday, at 7:30 in the morning, he went to pray Lauds with the community at Santa Monica, celebrated Mass, had breakfast, and then went to work. When lunchtime came, he would return to the Augustinians to eat. Two days after being elected Pope, he called the General of the Augustinians to say, 'On Tuesday, I'm coming to eat with you.' And he did. By this I mean that there are certain attitudes that he will continue to maintain.'

**The consistency of 'everyone, everyone, everyone.'** Francis has left countless phrases during his papacy: 'Make noise'; 'Kick forward'; 'Don't stand on the balcony of life'; 'Go out and be Samaritans'. But one has remained as a summary: 'In the Church, there is room for everyone'. Summed up in 'everyone, everyone, everyone'. This, which often seems like a happy improvisation or a brilliant idea inspired by a moment of inspiration when writing a speech, is something that Fr. Paco emphatically points out, based on his experiences with Bishop Bergoglio, that 'the same Bergoglio of "everyone, everyone, everyone" as Pope is the one who, as bishop, was very angry with a priest who refused to baptise the son of a prostitute. He made it clear that the Church must be open to everyone without exception. And he did so while being very aware of the reality of our slum, marked by vulnerability. He did not turn anyone away for having children out of wedlock or for being addicted to drugs. Knowing the person through his friends, knowing what they were like as priests and bishops,

we understand many of his decisions and courses of action. That 'everyone, everyone, everyone' is the soul of synodality. Of listening, of sharing, of teamwork. The Synod on Synodality is a coherent gesture in Francis' papacy, with bishops, lay men and women, religious men and women... "everyone, everyone, everyone".'

**Leo XIV, a close leader.** 'Roberto, ever since I have known him, has been a man of God. Capable of living the Augustinian attitude. The fundamental quality is community, but there is another, interiority, to find the God within you and, from there, see everything and discover everything. Leo XIV is an interior man. He is a man who trusts in God—a man of faith. In addition, he puts his natural intelligence at the service of others. In two ways, one charismatic and the other more pastoral. When he became General, he spent 12 years at the service of the community. His mission was to be with the Augustinian communities, and he travelled all over the world. He was a close friend of all the Augustinians and was able to establish relationships with people. He knew the Augustinians of the world by name. He was in schools, parishes, residences, and universities, with young people, children, and the elderly. He became one with each person.' This is how Fr. Ángel describes how Leo XIV exercised his position of responsibility as Roberto Prevost, Prior or Bishop.

**Synodal before becoming Pope.** 'Because of this sense of Augustinian community, he is a man who believes in synodality. Will he continue with synodality? It's in his blood. Will there be lay people in the government team that is going to be formed? There will be. He has said that, just as in dioceses there is an Episcopal Council, a bishop with his vicars, he wants to have a Council of Cardinals, where there are bishops, priests, lay people, women... It will be synodal, because of the typical quality of the Augustinian community.'

**Brothers in other religions.** Another surprise we saw in Francis' gestures, and one that made more than a few people throw their hands up in disbelief, were his meetings with leaders of other religions and world leaders who are "enemies". With some, he did not limit himself to a simple hug as a greeting, but even kissed their feet, as he did with the leaders of South Sudan, enemies and engaged in a fratricidal war. It was a surprise for most, but not for Fr. Paco. 'I have attended some national celebrations in the cathedral of Buenos Aires, where an imam, a Jewish patriarch or a Protestant pastor has spoken at the invitation of Bishop Bergoglio.' Pure ecumenism, which he had already promoted before being elected Pope.

**A Pope with a missionary character.** When I ask Fr. Ángel to tell me about the missionary character of his friend Roberto, he says: 'He spent weeks on the back of a mule to reach certain places in the Chiclayo mission. He suffered, he lived it, he was with the people, which is why he was so moved when he mentioned his beloved diocese of Chiclayo. He was a mission-



nary who identified with his people, knowing them because he had been among them, having involved himself with them. I know that he liked to find out what their problems were and tried to solve them. As a missionary, he embraced the doctrine of the Gospel and then passed it on by training other missionaries, trying to be with the people, to be there for others, to see their needs, to help them. He was not shy; he got involved, he worked with Caritas to find solutions to poverty in his diocese. He always did that.

'He also understood that an important task was to train missionaries. He enjoyed interacting with seminarians, and something greatly appreciated in Chiclayo was his closeness to the priests. He was a bishop who stood alongside the priests,' says Fr. Ángel about León XIV.

**Accompanying them in the hospital.** When Fr. Paco told me about Pope Francis' relationship with the priests of his diocese when he was bishop of Buenos Aires, he said that 'when an elderly priest who had no family nearby was admitted to the hospital for any illness, he would stay with them at night.' This is further proof that his defence of the elderly during his papacy and his insistence on caring for them were also a result of his personality, not just a stroke of genius on the part of a Pope.

**The missionary gestures of Leo XIV.** In my conversation with Fr. Ángel in the Archdiocese of Madrid, after describing the missionary character of Leo XIV, I asked him to tell me a significant anecdote about his missionary work in Peru as Monsignor Robert Prevost. He paused the conversation, took his mobile phone, searched through his contacts and... 'Good afternoon, Fr. Ángel.' 'Hello, Jasson, very good.' He had just called Fr. Jasson Serpertigue, who was Monsignor Robert Prevost's secretary for many years. He told us that Leo XIV "carries the missionary spirit in his heart. He knows how to behave, how to reach people and bring peace to conflicts." He told us two anecdotes that define Pope Leo XIV very well as a missionary. Generally, as is also the case in Chiclayo, in the most indigenous areas of the countries of America, dioceses are comprised of many different peoples and geographical regions, each with their unique expressions. 'He liked to learn these things. I even had to explain some very colloquial phrases to him on occasion. He was interested in them and sometimes used them himself. He likes to be with people just as they are.' Secondly, Fr. Jasson emphasises, 'he likes to be at the forefront when there is a need. Hence, the photo with him in Wellington boots in the middle of a flood. In Chiclayo, every two or three years, there is a natural disaster or problems with the farmers. That is why he was so keen to promote Caritas, which he put a woman in charge of.'

**A man of peace.** 'He was a bishop who was seen reconciling villages that were fighting over resources. He even climbed the highest walls to encourage them not to despair and to calm them down, because help would come for everyone.'

If we take this missionary attitude to a more institutional level, he knows how to tackle the most complicated problems and also how to solve them. It is not surprising that, as soon as he arrived, he had such an extraordinary conciliatory attitude that he has already had a conversation with Zelensky, the president of Ukraine. Both in his first speech in St. Peter's Square and in his audience with the media, we have heard messages calling for peace.

Towards the end of the conversation, he shared an anecdote that sums up very well who he is as a person, who he is as Roberto, Pope Leo XIV. 'On one occasion, some young people came to the bishop's office, desperate because they couldn't find enough olive branches for Palm Sunday. Ten minutes later, Bishop Roberto Prevost was cutting olive branches with them.' He is so human that once, at a youth gathering, one of the young people knew about mathematics, and since he is a mathematician, they ended up discussing mathematics.



Vatican Media

**A very human Pope.** Regarding the tear that almost came out when he was presented as Leo XIV on the balcony of the Vatican, Fr. Jasson tells us another anecdote. 'He has sometimes become very sad when he has seen clashes between priests, really sad. He knows the expression used in Chiclayo, 'the gringos have no feelings', that they go through life haughtily. On one of those occasions, he said that he knew this expression and affirmed that they did have feelings, many of them. He has a human dimension that is moved by things. Seeing himself clothed in Christ as Peter's successor moved him, as it surely moved Peter himself when the risen Christ asked him, 'Do you love me?' (Jn 21:17). That is the human side of a Pope, Leo XIV, clothed in Christ as Peter's successor.' For all these reasons, we hope that "Leo XIV will be very Roberto".

**Javier Trapero (Spain)**



# Facilitation Course 2025



The 2025 Training in Group Facilitation Course in English concluded on June 16, 2025. It was the third year the Program had been offered. As a new co-facilitator of the 2025 Course alongside Chris Chaplin and Gene Pejo, I have since been reflecting on what made the Course such a special experience for everyone involved and so enriching for me. I would like to share some of my reflections and insights as a Facilitator with you.

I found the course itself excellent. It was created and endorsed in response to stated priorities from the 2017 General Assembly. The need had been identified and prioritised. The course comprised ten modules of content delivered over thirteen weeks of online self-paced learning, from 1st March to 16th June. The components in the structure of the course were cohesive and reinforcing. The full course itself has received high praise from many for its creative and unique construction, engaging approach, and the volume and depth of its content.

There were twelve participants in the Course in 2025. The identification and registration of participants involved recommendations from Provincials and Leaders and were drawn from the wider Chevalier Family. This year's cohort included seven MSC Priests, one MSC Sister, and four DOLSH Sisters. This diversity of gender, locations, and missions enriched the interactions and sharing. The Course is deeply grounded in and highly reflective of the MSC Charism and Spirituality of the Heart.

My immersion and resonance with MSC reignited and deepened the fire within me. The course exposed Trainees to numerous experiential methodologies, moving

them beyond theory to embodied practice. Most were able to trial and refine their training skills in real situations as the Course progressed. The content's relevance and degree of application exceeded my expectations. Critical to the Course structure is the assignment of a Trainer to each Trainee within an Online Learning Community of four Trainees for the duration of the Course. Weekly support is vital for the Trainee. It allows for depth, processing questions and issues that may arise. With my background as a Clinical Psychotherapist and Spiritual Director, I found the opportunity for deep connection and personal exploration invaluable.

The OLC and Triads demonstrated possibilities to provide much-needed and appreciated peer networks and support structures. Trainees even expressed a desire to continue beyond the Course due to its acknowledged value. For me, the two-week face-to-face experiential practicum in Rome from 20th April to 2nd May was an integral and integrative highlight. Coming together in Rome, meeting and working face to face with the four trainees from our online learning group, along with six other trainees and the two trainers, Chris Chaplin and Gene Pejo, was not only enriching and community-building but also dynamic, transformative, and expansive. Grounding each day in trainee-led dynamic and experiential processes, such as Communal Wisdom, Mirroring Prototyping, and Deep Sharing, created a sacred crucible of shared faith, learning, and a joyous, celebratory community. As a facilitator, it offered me further scope to step back and 'let go and let God.'

**Wendy Bignell (Australia)**



## *Facilitation Training Practicum*

From April 20 to May 3, ten participants gathered at the Ursuline Sisters Convent in Rome for a two-week Intensive Facilitation Training Practicum. This diverse group included four FDNCS Sisters, one MSC Sister, and five MSC priests from seven different countries. We were fortunate to be accompanied and shaped by three experienced trainers: Wendy Bignell (a laywoman from Australia), Fr. Chris Chaplin MSC, and Fr. Gene Pejo MSC, both members of the MSC General Leadership Team.

The training was designed as an intensive, experiential learning process focused on facilitation. Over 11 full working

days, we participated in six sessions each day, dedicated to enhancing our understanding and practice of facilitation through real-time experience, reflection, and group process. Instead of concentrating on theoretical input, the emphasis was on learning by doing, observing, and receiving feedback, grounding us in a leadership style that listens deeply, discerns collectively, and accompanies others with presence and care.

Our days began and ended with moments of prayer and Eucharist. On Monday, April 21, we celebrated a special Opening Mass and Ritual in the Chapel, entrusting our journey to the Spirit and to one another. A similar ritual marked our Closing Mass on Friday, May 2, during which the trainees themselves facilitated the liturgy, offering a meaningful symbol of the growth and integration we had undergone. Most mornings, participants had the option to join the Ursuline community for Mass, while our trainers joined the MSC Generalate community nearby.

A particularly profound and historic moment occurred during our training: on April 21, we received the sad news of the death of Pope Francis. As a group gathered in Rome for learning, discernment, and prayer, we were deeply moved to be present at this moment in the life of the Church. Attending the funeral Mass of Pope Francis was a humbling and grace-filled experience. Our hearts were heavy with grief but also filled with immense gratitude for the life of a shepherd who led with compassion, humility, and a deep love for the people. His legacy of integrity, simplicity, and Gospel-centered leadership will continue to inspire the Church for generations to come. During our time in Rome, we also witnessed the election of the new Pope, another powerful reminder of the Spirit's continued guidance and the ongoing renewal of the Church.

*It was a rich time of formation and transformation, deepened by intercultural and inter-congregational exchange.*



A highlight of our community life was the social evenings with the MSC General House community on 25 April and 2 May. These gatherings allowed us to unwind, share stories, and strengthen bonds across congregations and cultures.

Each training day followed a structured rhythm:

**Session 1:** Practice of Communal Wisdom (CW), using the discernment method described in *Communal Wisdom: A Way of Discernment for a Pilgrim Church* by Fr. Brian Gallagher MSC.

**Session 2:** Group review of the CW session reflecting on what happened within the group and for the facilitator.

**Session 3:** Co-facilitation of prepared scenarios by pairs of trainees, offering an opportunity to design and lead a process with the full group.

**Session 4:** Review of the facilitated scenario, using the same reflective principles.

**Session 5:** Quads—small groups assigned to each trainer, fostering self-directed facilitation in a space with no set agenda, allowing real group dynamics to emerge and be processed.

**Session 6:** Accompaniment—a flexible time with each trainer deciding how best to support the growth of their group through individual or collective reflection.

Saturday, April 26, was dedicated to integrating the first week's learning, guided by the trainers through structured exercises in reflection, harvesting, and shared insights. The final day, May 2, reflected this integration with a focus on closure and synthesis, bringing together our learning from Modules 1-4 and the Intensive Practicum of the facilitation training.

Throughout the practicum, trainees were consistently encouraged to adopt a stance of curiosity, openness, and responsibility:

What are you sensing?

What do you think?

What have you experienced?

What did you find worked or didn't and why?

This approach cultivated not only skills but also a facilitative presence grounded in listening, discernment, and communal wisdom—hallmarks of a leadership that reflects the Heart of Jesus.

It was a rich time of formation and transformation, deepened by intercultural and inter-congregational exchange, and profoundly influenced by the unfolding life of the Church in Rome. As we returned to our respective ministries, we took with us new tools, a deeper awareness, and a renewed commitment to serve with hearts attuned to the Spirit's movement in the community and in various ministries.

Thank you, Chris, Wendy, and Gene, for this wonderful and meaningful program. I express my deep gratitude to you. Our sincere appreciation goes to our respective communities for their support.

**Sr. Cathie Mwagioidi, FDNCS (Papua New Guinea)**

## *My Experience of the Practicum Training in Group Facilitation*

On Easter Sunday this year (20th April 2025), ten of us from the Chevalier family, including four Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH), one Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart (MSS), and five Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), gathered at the Ursuline Sisters convent in Rome to begin a time of growing together in the skills of group facilitation.

Before this workshop, we had embarked on an online journey to learn the theory and dynamics of group facilitation. We diligently completed the first four online modules in just over a month and participated in an online learning community (OLC) comprising 3-4 members, where we practised the art of mirroring our experiences of challenges to one another. In the OLC, we took turns holding space for each person to share, resisted the urge to solve problems, and opened ourselves to the Spirit for inspiration through words and images that could illuminate our experiences. It was also a time for me to become more intimately acquainted with my group in their ministries around the world. During that first month, each of us was closely guided by an experienced trainer who checked in on our progress with the course content and any challenges we encountered. This created anticipation as we gathered in Rome to finally meet in person. There were twelve participants who initiated the journey, but two were unable to join us in Rome due to visa and other issues. We were also joined by three trainers: Wendy Bignell, Gene Pejo, and Chris Chaplin, the latter two from the General Leadership Team of the MSCs.

The workshop officially commenced on Easter Monday, when we were introduced to one another and to the communal wisdom process that involved listening as a stepping stone to what the Spirit was conveying to us collectively. During the morning break, news began filtering in that Pope Francis had passed away earlier that day. Disbelief quickly transformed into shock and sadness. For many of us, Pope Francis had been a wellspring of inspiration and wisdom. His constant encouragement for the Church to take risks, to reach out to the peripheries, to be a field hospital for the wounded, for pastors to smell like the sheep, and for all of humanity to care for our common home left an enduring challenge as we navigated our loss over the next few days. We brought some of these insights and sentiments to share during the opening Mass as part of our initiation into this practicum. Grief would become a consistent vulnerability during our time together and perhaps a 'thorn in the flesh' too, as during that



period, news arrived of other losses we also faced individually of people we knew.

For the next few days in that first week, we took turns in pairs to lead each facilitation, based on a pre-planned communal wisdom process. We also had fun alternating to facilitate the group in various scenarios that involved brainstorming and role-playing. The review after each session was essential as we learnt to be sensitive to what worked and what didn't. The trainers provided valuable feedback, and I felt like I learnt so much about the actual group dynamics and how I came across to others in such a facilitation scenario. We could frame our learning to sense the Spirit according to the four movements of the Spirituality of the Heart: encounter, intimacy, conversion, and mission. We experienced varying degrees of comfort in this process of group facilitation and communal discernment, but it was certainly a concrete expression of living out a heart spirituality.

The first week concluded with the decision to participate in the funeral requiem Mass for Pope Francis. The turnout in Rome that day was nearly half a million. After that, we returned, and Chris and the trainers led a session where we communally processed how we had been affected by the losses and the letting go of the past week. This began with finding a symbol that represented our grief and placing it in the central heart-space to honour our reality. The process ended as we sensed the Spirit's prompting in each other to give thanks for what is/was and to come together to celebrate life as a community. This was one of the highlights for me during the practicum that I remember well.

In the second week of the practicum, we continued to fine-tune the art of facilitation through deep listening to each other's sentiments, including conflict, and to the Spirit calling us collectively to mission from that place of willing vulnerability. I have learnt to better read the group and trust my instincts in leading as a facilitator, coming to see facilitation as a gracious stance in life. I have also made some wonderfully gifted friends and collaborators in the Lord's vineyard, and for all of this, I am most grateful.

**Krish Jon Mathavan, MSC (Singapore)**

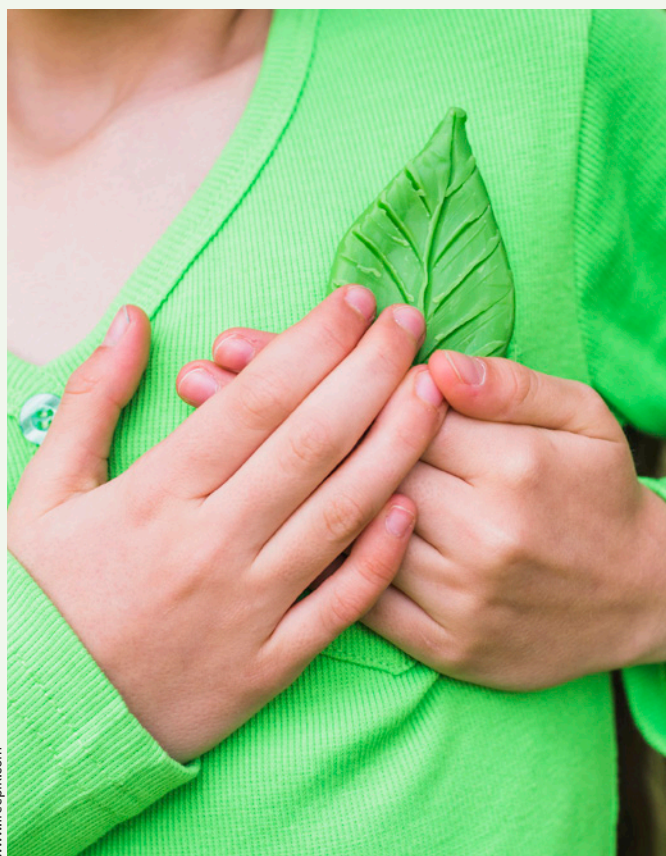
# *The Spirituality of the Heart in a Wounded World*

As we approach the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart it is timely that we also commemorate the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato si'* which Daniel O'Leary has referred to as God's love story (in *This Astonishing Secret, The Love Story of Creation and the Wonder of You*, Garratt, Melbourne, 2018) which encapsulates 'a listening that draws God ever nearer to all people especially the oppressed, the suffering and also a groaning creation.' When we consider that heart and earth use the same letters, much of this makes sense. God's love is revealed through a broken heart to reveal the extent of that love in Jesus and to let the world in to make healing and liberation possible. And in October 2024, Pope Francis published *Dilexit nos* 'on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ.' As I reflect on these, the word 'wound' keeps appearing more than forty times in *Dilexit nos*.

Matthew Fox says that 'The Cosmic Christ is present wherever there is pain. The Cosmic Christ unites all this pain in the one divine heart, in the one divine – but wounded – body of the Christ which is the body of the universe. The Cosmic Christ is the crucified and suffering one in every creature, just as much as the Cosmic Christ is the radiant one, the divine mirror glistening and glittering in every creature. Divinity is not spared suffering – that is the lesson of the Cosmic Christ who suffers.' The heart of Christ is forever being pierced. It is pointing to the pain the lives of people, the wounds in the Earth – God's gift of creation – as well as the dignity of all that God has created. And we cannot be silent in the face of this. As Yolanda Pierce writes (in *The Wounds Are the Witness: Black Faith Weaving Memory into Justice and Healing*) 'to be silent is to risk that stories will be forgotten, root causes of pains will be ignored, and extraordinary moments of healing will go unrecognised as a provision of God's justice.'

We must remember this in our ministry as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart because only God's justice can heal our spirits and renew our hearts. Pierce continues, 'our stories are too important to forget .... For wounded people, landscapes, and communities exist not only as a legacy of traumas and harms but as evidence of the undeniable power of memory and the unstoppable quest for justice. When the wounds bear witness, the world can ne-





The spirituality of the heart calls for constant change of heart that amplifies the cry of our siblings, especially those appealing to us to be heard, as well as our common home in which we all share. By listening to these cries, we can awaken the consciences of all to the plight of our siblings. We need to recognise that we are all interconnected, which 'cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings' (LS, 91). The poet, John Muir says, 'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.' Pope Francis combined this interconnectedness in both *Laudato si'* where 'all creation is connected' and *Fratelli Tutti* where 'everyone is connected.' This is so poignant today as we observe Palestinian people being erased from their lands, coupled with the violence of silence. It highlights the reality that at the heart of injustice and violence is the one we ignore, neglect, condemn or erase, which is not like us.

At the heart of the gospels and our spirituality is the promotion of justice, peace and care for one another, the other, and creation. The call for a contemplative gaze (*Laudato si'*) means appreciating God's wonders by sharing God's passion for the world's flourishing, beginning with our neighbour and grieving with God to resist whatever degrades people or creation.

This calls for 'a politics of vulnerability' made possible by recovering kindness, which 'frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships ...(and) once kindness becomes a culture within society it transforms lifestyles, relationships and the ways ideas are discussed and compared' (*Fratelli tutti* 222-224).

The Spirituality of the Heart is a call to look at our world through the lens of a heart that is broken and thus always open. This is how the heart of God is continually broken open to let the world in – where the cry of people calls for appreciation, acceptance, equity and justice. It is not enough for us to appreciate Jesus or celebrate the dream of the founders of religious congregations. We must embody their dreams today. Though constantly vulnerable to human rejection, God embodies agonising love and does not let suffering have the last word. The broken and poor Jesus consciously identified with women, children, Samaritans, tax-collectors, outsiders and still does through us. He ascended into heaven bearing scars and wounds, and they are about love and connection.

Leonard Cohen in an interview said, 'If the wound of Jesus comes to express his love for (man)kind, then it will never heal'. It reveals the heart of God - a heart that wants to touch our wounds and those of Mother Earth. Can we live from a heart that serves, shows compassion, seeks justice, welcomes the stranger, protects the vulnerable and God's creation, which goes beyond minimalist standards of the law? Let us not be afraid, as Joanna Macy says, to allow our hearts to be broken open because it lets the world in, and healing follows. **Claude Mostowik, MSC (Australia)**

ver claim ignorance of another's pain. When the wounds bear witness, there is awe and wonder at the capacity for laughter and joy even amid sorrow. When the wounds bear witness, they tell the truth about both the extent of the injury and the extraordinary work of healing.' It is necessary to look, to see, to listen to the reality of a hurting people and the earth. These take us into the heart of reality and put us in touch with the loving kindness of God.

*The Spirituality of the Heart is a call to look at our world through the lens of a heart that is broken and thus always open.*

# Growing our Charism

## Charism: A Gift of the Spirit

“Charisms are special gifts of the Holy Spirit which are bestowed on individuals for the good of others, the needs of the world, and in particular for the building up of the Church.” (CCCC, 160).

Charisms are personal gifts from God given to be shared for the good of ourselves, others, and the Universal Church. Charisms are God’s way of allowing the uniqueness of each person to become crucial for the common good and to draw people together into an understanding of how to live and love as God would. This is what Fr Jules Chevalier did in 1854: he took his personal gift and shared it with his community, thereby founding the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSCs). Later, Mother Marie Louise Hartzer and Fr Hubert Linckens saw an alignment between their own personal gifts and those of Jules, joining his community and founding the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (FDNSC) and the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (MSC Sisters).

A charism provides a community with a common story to enter, a common language to speak, a group to belong to, a way to pray, a work to undertake, and a face of God to see (Marechal, 2000). In our Chevalier Family, the MSCs, FDNSC, the MSC Sisters and the Laity of the Chevalier Family work together as interconnected branches, sharing the same charism, but each in their own distinctive way.

## A Common Story to Enter

The Chevalier Family’s common story begins with Fr Jules Chevalier, a French priest in the 19th century, with a

mission to make the love of the Heart of Jesus known everywhere. The MSCs, the FDNSC, and the MSC Sisters also have their own rich histories, stories marked by growth, renewal, and faithfulness to that original mission.

We, as the Laity of the Chevalier Family, must capture our own story, which builds upon the inspiration of Fr Jules Chevalier and acknowledges the work of the many religious who have paved the way, formed and developed us. It must capture our journey, as lay groups across the world, as national lay councils, and as one international lay family, connected but autonomous to the other branches of the Chevalier Family.

In recent years, we have seen the emergence of two characters in the story of the Laity: Blessed Peter To Rot<sup>2</sup> (1912 - 1945) and Blessed Benedict Daswa<sup>1</sup> (1946 - 1990). Both were members of the Laity of the Chevalier Family before our formal movement was established. Their courageous lives and ultimate sacrifices offer profound inspiration to us all. We must begin to collect and share the stories of those who have lived as Chevalier Family Laity, as these examples guide and encourage us in living out our faith and mission today.

## A Common Language to Speak

As we continue to break down language barriers through our use of volunteer translators and AI translations, we must still wrestle with developing a common language. A language that is inclusive and heart-centred. A language that celebrates our differences, respects our cultures, and unites us as one family. A language shaped by the Spirituality of the Heart.

As a branch of the Chevalier Family, our language must reflect this connection whilst also confirming our own identity as laity. We are not separate from the wider Chevalier Family. Yet, we bring a unique voice, a lay perspective grounded in everyday experience, community life, and a commitment to living out the Spirituality of the Heart in the world. Our language, therefore, must bridge tradition and contemporary relevance, expressing both our shared mission and our particular lay vocation. It should speak to the sacredness of ordinary life, the dignity of every person, and the hope we bring as we care for our common home.

We recognise the presence of God in every person, and we honour this by choosing language that is inclusive, respectful, and affirming. We do this by using gender-neutral expressions, avoiding divisive or limiting labels, and always speaking in ways that foster belonging and dignity. In doing so, we create a space where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. The language of the Heart becomes a language of unity, healing, and transformation.







### A Way to Pray

As Laity of the Chevalier Family, we are called “to be on Earth the Heart of God”. This apostolic work must be continually nourished by prayer, whether through traditional forms such as devotions and community prayer, or through more contemporary practices such as meditative contemplation and time spent in Creation.

Spirituality of the Heart invites us on a journey of inner transformation, encouraging us to trust in God and be open to the Spirit’s movement in our daily lives. Fr Jules Chevalier himself contemplated the Heart of Christ in whom is revealed the compassionate love of the Father; he discovered there the remedy for the ills of the world (MSC Constitutions, #3-4).

For us lay people, without a religious community to support the deepening of our spirituality and inner life, we must find ways to engage in contemplative prayer. By silently dwelling in the presence of God, we allow our spiritual lives to be enriched and strengthened, enabling us to embody the Heart of God in our everyday actions and relationships.

### A Work to Undertake

It is no accident that the charism shared by Fr Jules Chevalier can be found in many countries around the world. This charism calls us to reveal God’s love to all people, especially those who are most in need. To love everyone where they are at, without any expectation or judgement. We, as laity, are called to do this wherever we are - In our workplace, in our homes, and in our communities. At the last International Assembly, I asked that we understand and recognise our responsibility to Creation as world

citizens, as Catholics, and as Laity of the Chevalier Family. We must raise our voices and act for change. We must recognise that Creation powerfully reflects a God of life and relationship and reminds us of our sacred task of preserving and protecting Creation from which all life comes. The reality of this work is challenging. While we do not need to travel overseas to become missionaries, we carry out this work in an increasingly secular society, wherever we are. We need to live counterculturally, to show God’s Heart on Earth. We must commit to upholding human dignity, peace-building, and caring for Creation in all aspects of our lives.

### A Face of God to See

God’s face is most visible in Jesus’ compassionate Heart - especially in those experiencing poverty, suffering, and marginalisation. It is in the simple, everyday encounters of life among family, friends, colleagues, and amidst the challenges of the modern world that we witness God. It is through these human relationships, expressed through gentle acts of love and kindness, that we see the Heart of Jesus and the face of God.

To truly embody this compassion, we must open our hearts and minds to listen deeply to the stories of others. We are called to spend time with them, to walk alongside them on their journey, and to share in both their struggles and their hopes. In doing so, we become more attuned to experiencing God living within them.

At the same time, we must also be aware that God dwells within us. Our actions, words, and attitudes must reflect this sacred reality so that others can see God’s face shining through us. By living in this awareness, we become living signs of God’s love and mercy in the world, bridging divides and fostering a more profound sense of connection and belonging for all.

### Where to From Here?

We must continue to develop this charism to ensure it is evident in everything we do and to ensure that these aspects all point not just to community, but through community towards God. Indeed, if “charisms are special gifts of the Holy Spirit which are bestowed on individuals for the good of others, the needs of the world, and in particular for the building up of the Church” (CCCC, 160), then we must be clear on our shared and emerging charism and be able to articulate what it is so that we can share it with the world.

### References

Marachel, C. (2000). Toward an effective partnership between religious and laity in fulfilment of charism and responsibility for mission. Charism and Spirituality, Proceedings of the 56th Conference of the Unione Superiore Generali, Rome.

**Aidan Johnson (Australia)**

# Initial formation and mental health



www.freepk.com

Our Congregation's current document on training, entitled 'Emmaus: training of the heart' (2023), presents training in two stages: initial training and continuing training. The section devoted to initial formation is the most extensive. From the Aspirant stage to the Post-Novitiate, via the Pre-Novitiate and Novitiate, several sections are dedicated to the psychological aspects of the formation process of young people. A few aspects deserve our attention and should be highlighted in the context of this reflection:

- At the Aspirant level, the stage of Encounter, it is noted: "... become aware of one's history, significant experiences in one's life, physical and mental health, and motivations for continuing to be accompanied. (Emmaus, 2.2.).
  - At the Pre-Novitiate, the stage of Intimacy, it is written: '... For this reason, it is necessary that, during this stage or in the early phases of the pre-novitiate, a complete psychological assessment be carried out by a qualified person.' (Emmaus, 5.1-2).
  - In the Novitiate, a stage devoted to Conversion, the document emphasises the psychological dimension in these terms: "...the aim is "consistency" between "ideas and behaviour". This requires the development of emotional and affective stability, a capacity for intimacy and balanced relationships, and that they themselves clarify their identity and sexual orientation (Emmaus, 12.3).
  - In the Post-Novitiate, the stage preparing for the Mission, accompaniment is specified as follows: 'This accompaniment will pay attention to the following elements: sound and realistic judgement, psychosexual integration and healthy affectivity, autonomy, sense of responsibility and co-responsibility, self-knowledge and acceptance, and personal integration...' (Emmaus, 20.2).
- This emphasis on taking psychological dimensions into account in the formation process reveals the importan-

ce that our Congregation attaches to the integral well-being of the human person. In this article, we focus on initial formation and mental health.

According to the WHO Constitution, 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.' This means that there is an interdependence between the physiological, psychological and social dimensions of health. In this context, we will focus on the psychological or mental aspect of health. Mental health is a complex concept, and its definition depends not only on the theoretical framework in which it is situated, but also on societies, eras and contexts.

According to the WHO (2009), 'mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.' In this sense, a person with good mental health is someone who can adapt to the various situations in their life, including frustrations and joys, difficult times and problems to be solved. It is important to note that this definition of mental health extends far beyond merely the absence of mental illness. Indeed, a person can be in poor mental health without displaying clinical symptoms of 'mental disorders or illnesses' such as schizophrenia or depression. Mental health encompasses aspects related to well-being, *joie de vivre*, optimism, self-confidence, interpersonal skills and emotional regulation. It is not a fixed state but a continual search for balance between constraints and resources (Pereira et al. 2021).

For our part, by 'mental health' we mean the consistent way of thinking, feeling, reacting, interacting, and interpreting events and situations. This way of thinking can



be good or bad (pathological). We should avoid the confusion that is often made between 'mental health' and 'mental illness'. These concepts are similar but distinct. At this stage of our reflection, we may ask ourselves: Why discuss mental health in initial training?

In our Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, initial formation begins with an encounter between a candidate and a representative of the Congregation. Under normal circumstances, at the Aspirant stage, we primarily welcome young adults, i.e., young people who have recently left adolescence. Psychologically, however, every transition from one stage of life to another, and especially adolescence, is often accompanied by crises of many kinds. These crises, which are nevertheless necessary for psychological and human maturation, can have problematic or pathogenic consequences for some people. This is why it is essential to consider the uniqueness of each candidate we welcome.

Initial training prepares young people for their mission. This period of preparation should bring together all the ingredients necessary for a coherent missionary experience. In other words, during initial training, conditions must be created that enable good mental health in both the present and the future. In practical terms, we must avoid creating or maintaining situations that generate frustration or latent wounds, which can lead to mental health problems in adulthood. Psychological science teaches us that some mental health problems, even some 'severe mental illnesses,' have their roots in early childhood or adolescence. Each of us is what our history makes us.

My experience as a trainer has shown me that some young people arrive with a heavy and painful background. Others come from problematic family backgrounds, while others still come from areas or regions of armed conflict or war-torn countries where violence is the law. In short, some young people have experienced events with a high potential for trauma. In this sense, a training centre should also become a 'hostel that heals' psychologi-

cal wounds. Suppose it cannot fulfil this therapeutic mission. In that case, a training centre should at least achieve a diagnostic mission, i.e. enable each candidate to become aware of their painful past, to verbalise it and, if possible, to refer them to a mental health specialist so that they can receive adequate and effective help (see Emmaüs). This is where the need for training for trainers arises, as they are called upon to accompany, support, and guide young people in their training.

During initial training, trainers should at least be able to identify the 'red flags' or symptoms of possible mental health problems. This task is essential, but trainers should also raise awareness and educate young people in training to develop and maintain good mental hygiene through a balanced approach that combines spiritual and academic activities, relaxation, and good personal and environmental hygiene. Isn't there an old saying that 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'?

With this in mind, the preventive dimension will enable the entire Community to avoid becoming 'firefighters' when serious mental health difficulties arise among its members. Today, some of our colleagues suffer from mental health problems such as addiction to substances (alcohol, tobacco, cocaine) and objects (telephones, television, etc.). Do we really think that this has started today? Certainly not. We must realise that there can be no effective and fruitful mission without the good mental health of its members. We can train members intellectually and spiritually, but if we neglect their psychological and emotional well-being, we will create 'monsters'. Later on, the price we will pay is that we will spend most of our time solving avoidable problems. As a result, at the leadership level, the energy that should be directed towards planning and working for the emergence of our religious family will be invested in the treatment and follow-up of 'difficult cases'. Prevention is better than cure, as the saying goes.

In conclusion, far from wanting to provide solutions to this very complex issue, our aim was to raise collective awareness of the importance of mental health during initial formation. Very often, we see confusion between 'spiritual problems' and mental health problems. This confusion is sometimes due to the stigma attached to the field of psychology in certain parts of the world. Today, we must recognise that clinical psychology serves mental health through awareness, promotion, diagnosis, care and follow-up or support for people facing mental health problems. Mental health issues affect us all, but to varying degrees. We must therefore provide everyone with appropriate spaces to talk about their painful experiences, while paying attention to aspects such as conflict management, the exercise of authority, living and working conditions, etc., which can become risk factors for mental health problems.

**Didier Mbela Bongoy, MSC (Congo)**



# New Mission in Ireland

*I am indeed glad to express and write about my experience*

Arriving in Ireland as a religious priest from a vastly different culture has been nothing short of a profound transformation. From my very first steps onto this enchanted isle—its rolling green hills, ancient stone churches, and vibrant history—I was immediately enveloped by the warm embrace of a community steeped in tradition, faith, and resilience. This document captures my journey, the challenges faced, the friendships formed, and the deep connections made within the Irish community.

My journey has been a beautiful blend of exhilaration and challenges. Transitioning not only demands a geographical adjustment but also an immersive dive into a rich tapestry of customs and beliefs that define Irish society. Upon my arrival, I was consistently welcomed with open arms, and it became clear that despite our diverse backgrounds, our shared calling as ministers of faith created an unbreakable bond among us.

Joining the local community, I was introduced to a world filled with visual and auditory wonders. Fr. Joe, the provincial superior, emerged as a steadfast companion on this journey.

His genuine care, brotherly love, and affection helped ease my transition, instilling in me a sense of belonging. Fr. Joe encouraged us in our discernment process and consistently reminded us of our mission and purpose in this beautiful land. His support, along with the daily conversations held with my MSC brother priests at Woodview House, blossomed into a deeper understanding and commitment to our work in Ireland.

What truly captured my heart, however, was the dynamic sense of community that infused every corner of this country with life and purpose. My fellow priests welcomed me into their missions. They shared their personal stories and experiences, imparting the richness of Irish traditions and the profound joy they derive from serving in this historical land. Each day presented a new opportunity to learn, particularly alongside my three companions from India, Tijo John and Alexander, who enriched our collective experience with their unique perspectives. As we travelled to places like Galway and Cork, our young and older brother priests became invaluable guides through the intricate nuances of Irish customs. Their anecdotes, layered with humour and steeped in history, revealed how deeply faith is woven into daily life. From traditional blessings to the cherished art of storytelling, these experiences prompted me to reflect on my faith journey and consider how it might resonate within this new cultural context.

One of the highlights of my time here was participating in a two-week seminar focused on Inculturation. This was not just a workshop; it was an awakening, equipping me with the necessary tools to navigate this new culture and church. Each session invigorated my spirit and deepened my commitment to serving the people of God in Ireland with joy and dedication.

At the heart of the Irish community, I discovered that faith transcends obligation; it is a shared journey. We celebrate each other's joys and navigate sorrows together, continuously learning from one another. Each interaction became a lesson, reinforcing that while our paths may differ, the mission to spread love and compassion remains a universal one. So far, my time in Ireland has evolved beyond a mere pastoral assignment; it is a voyage of mutual growth, understanding, and profound connection.

As I continue to embrace this vibrant culture, I carry with me the echoes of laughter, the warmth of shared faith, and the enduring strength of a community that feels not only welcoming but, remarkably, like home. This journey is just beginning, and I am excited to see where this path will lead as I continue to intertwine my story with the rich tapestry of Ireland.

**Prasad Rao, MSC (India)**





## Home away from Home

The three confreres from the Indian province arrived in Ireland two months ago to commence the new mission. We thank the Generalate, the Irish MSC province, and the Indian MSC province for this initiative and fresh vision. The history of the church vividly describes the tremendous, tireless ministry carried out by Irish missionaries in general. They were instrumental in many places, both for the origin and existence of the church. When we were chosen for this new mission, we felt elated because we are coming to a country renowned for its richness in many aspects: deeply rooted faith, generous and loving people, stunning geography, and significant historical events, among others. When we shared our news with friends and family, they expressed their happiness and encouragement regarding our new mission, which gave us even more energy and eagerness to begin our journey. Our founder, Fr. Jules Chevalier, expressed clearly and deeply believed in 'SENSE OF BELONGING' and 'SENSE OF BROTHERHOOD'. This is what we're experiencing with our Irish MSC confreres. From Fr. Joseph McGhee, the provincial, to all the community superiors and the Irish MSC confreres, there has been warmth, welcome, and friendly support. This is a great sign and encouragement for newcomers. Since many of them have served as missionaries in various countries, their guidance, support, and input have genuinely helped us discern and nurture hope for the mission.

During the first two weeks of March, we attended a course on INCULTURATION, which has provided us with new insights about the church, society, and current situations. Particularly, we had a course on CHILD SAFEGUAR-



DING, which I believe is essential for understanding the church's and society's positions. As we prepare to work in a new place, this course heightened my awareness of how I should conduct myself as a clergy member. We were also instructed on how to respond when unpleasant situations arise, specifically regarding notifying the appropriate individuals. These two weeks helped me become more aware and alert. Additionally, we had a day out for a heritage visit, exploring nearby locations, which helped us comprehend the significance of this area. These two weeks allowed us to learn about cultural differences and the importance of all cultures.

Meanwhile, we were also working on getting immigration clearance, a PPS number, and other basic necessities for our initial process for the mission. We will also get a glimpse of ministry experience in our three counties: Dublin, Cork, and Galway. Each of us will go to different places and swap after a few months. We're praying and hoping to start the new mission with great enthusiasm.

**Alexander MSC (India)**

## Blessed Peter To Rot: Canonization date Announced by The Holy father

Postulator General, Fernando Clemente MSC, was present at the public consistory held at the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican on Friday, 13 June 2025, during which the Holy Father announced the date of the canonization of Blessed Peter To Rot. The celebration will take place on 19 October 2025 in St Peter's Square. In keeping with the nature of the event, the consistory was attended by the cardinals residing in Rome and the postulators of the causes concerned.



# Ad Limina 2025

This year, the General Administration is holding a 10-Day Ad Limina Program for MSC Leaders from April 1-10. Present were several provincials and superiors from Curitiba, São Paulo, the USA, Ireland, India, Korea, the Pacific Islands, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and Japan.

Four important agendas were discussed during this meeting, namely: a renewal of mission and communion, formation in leadership, a time for reflection and prayer, and building a global sense of unity. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to enhance the quality of leadership, mission, and confraternity within each entity.



## 86th Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart: 'Mother of Hope'

Early in the morning, caravans of devotees arrived from all corners of Brazil. Other devotees were already there on the hill of Vila Formosa, ready to welcome the pilgrims. The Chevalier Family: Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, lay men and women all gathered in the same spirit as their founder to honour Mary in a special way.

The first Mass, presided over by the Provincial Father, Fr. Luís Carlos Araújo Moraes, was followed by preparations for the procession. The faithful took to the streets of the neighbourhood, among them our exalted patroness. The tower of the sanctuary, with its 47 bells, joined its song to that of the people, and together they sang praises to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. The Solemn Mass was pre-

sided over by Dom Manoel Ferreira dos Santos Júnior, MSC – bishop of the Diocese of Registro, in the interior of São Paulo.

Dom Ricardo Pedro Paglia, MSC – bishop emeritus of Pinhoiro, MA – presided over one of the most anticipated moments: the coronation of the image of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Very moved, he testified, as Chevalier, that 'she has done everything in our favour,' preparing and sustaining the mission entrusted to our congregation. The celebrations of the 86th Feast of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart ended with a third Mass, presided over by the rector of the sanctuary, Fr. Girley de Oliveira Reis, MSC, to whom we offer our congratulations for his work and dedication.

**Elinaldo Assunção, MSC (Brazil)**





# Jubilee experience

In addition to experiencing the death of Pope Francis with sorrow, sadness and hope, says Fr. José Manuel González Trobo, MSC, parish priest of the MSC parish of San Federico, our goal was to go to Rome as pilgrims in this Jubilee Year and symbolically cross the four Holy Doors.

Thirty-three of us set out on our journey. We went as pilgrims, not as mere tourists, discovering places that made us vibrate inwardly, recognising the signs of hope in our world (the Jubilee for Young People and the tomb of Carlo Acutis in Assisi), seeing the good that exists in it and hearing Jesus' call to sow hope by defending life and the rights of the most fragile and weakest members of our society.



This jubilee pilgrimage to Rome in April has been filled with experiences that I would like to share with many people in the group throughout this week in Rome.

- 1.- It has been a time of God's grace and mercy to strengthen relationships, deepen our trust in Jesus of Nazareth and experience the closeness of the community-group.
- 2.- To live and become more consciously aware of the essence of fraternity. To be companions on the journey. To reach out to our fellow travellers who, at a given moment, needed our help and company.
- 3.- A call from Jesus to change our selfish attitudes (conversion) and to live a healthier and more positive lifestyle.
- 4.- To become aware of our mission as Christians and our commitment to solidarity with the most vulnerable.

These experiences took shape at different moments:

- First moment: Holy Doors. Procession along the Via della Conciliazione, confession of our faith before the tomb of the Apostle Peter and updating of the words of John 10:9 in the other three basilicas: 'I am the door: whoever enters through me will be saved...'. A second meaning for the group was the need to enter and live in community, the door that leads to encounter and dialogue, to reconciliation and peace.
- Second moment: Reconciliation. How important it is for us to live reconciled with one another, to restore our relationships and bonds! We experienced this in Santa Maria Maggiore, where Pope Francis rests.

Third moment: Prayer. There were very significant moments of prayer. We began the day at 8:00 a.m. in the beautiful chapel of the Vatican Priests' Residence, giving meaning to the new day ahead of us. I would like to highlight the prayer of the "Acordaos" in the Shrine of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Piazza Navona; the prayer in the Catacombs; in the Porziuncola in Assisi; at the tombs of St. Clare and Carlo Acutis in Assisi.

· Fourth moment. The Eucharist. The central moment of each day in various churches of the Diocese of Rome: San Lorenzo, Santa Ana, in the Abbey of Tre Fontana and the final Eucharist in the residence, expressing the experiences of the pilgrimage. All were very participatory, dynamic and welcoming. Songs. Manifestation of feelings of joy and remembrance of our sick brothers and sisters and our communities in Madrid.

· Fifth moment: Sharing. Meals, joys, a few falls, the culture of Rome, museums, conversations along the way, tiredness, the night march to the coffin of our brother and Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica... we carry him in our hearts. Rest in peace.

We can conclude that this Jubilee Pilgrimage to Rome in 2025 has helped us to open the doors of our hearts a little more to God's mercy, to strengthen our community relationships, to look to the future with more hope and to feel more clearly our mission and commitment to the different faces of poverty that surround us. And we understand better at this moment in human history that 'hope does not disappoint' but is very necessary to overcome the fatigue, crises and anxiety that accompany us at times. We feel more strongly our vocation to be "Pilgrims of Hope".

**José Manuel González Trobo, MSC (Spain)**

## Re-elected Provincial

Michael Huber re-elected as Provincial of the Province of Southern Germany/Austria.



# 25th anniversary of the religious life



**Fr. Jean Marie NDour, msc. Kaolack, Senegal.** This year, as I prepare to celebrate my 25th anniversary of religious life in the Congregation, I would like to say a few words about how I have lived these rich years of my life as an MSC. As St. Ignatius said in the introduction to the Spiritual Exercises: “I wanted to enter this year of grace with a generous heart and with generosity towards God, our Creator and Lord, continuing to offer him my whole being.”

For me, the silver jubilee is a special time to reencounter the Sacred Heart of Jesus and rediscover the first place of God in my heart and my life, as I did nearly 25 years ago in Pretoria, South Africa. I would also like to edify one another through our desire for God, our prayer, our thirst to listen to Him, to follow Him, and to love Him.

It’s about sharing more than the joy of a jubilee, but sharing this desire to continue letting my heart burn for the Lord. This time is an opportunity for me to tend to my vocation and my relationship with Christ, who continues to call me. Through this jubilee, I wanted to continue taking care of myself, attending to my vocation, learning to be faithful to it, and continuing to respond to the mission entrusted to me.

As a religious, I have spent many hours over the past 25 years caring for others in our apostolic structures, including plants, animals, children, schoolchildren, the sick, novices, confreres, and young people in formation in other congregations. And during all that time, I have never been afraid or doubted that the Lord would take care of me in return, despite the countless times I have not been faithful as the Lord desires.

However, during all this time, I did not drown myself in service to others, but always tried to take care of my vocation, to cultivate it, to make it grow, and this is not something

that can be taken for granted forever; I must continue to take care of it every day. ‘The perfect religious is the one who adores, obeys, serves and offers the most perfect sacrifice,’ said Father Chevalier.

And for this, three attitudes can guide the thread of my 25 years of MSC religious life: remembering, taking courage and renewing my yes.

## 1. Remember

I am reaching my 25th year with all these burdens, which are joyful in my passion to transmit the Gospel, but also heavier in particular difficulties I have encountered in Cameroon, Kinshasa and Senegal. As Pope Francis said in one of his speeches: “Brothers, Jesus knows our efforts and our successes, as well as our failures and misfortunes, more than ever. He is the first to say to us: ‘Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and become my disciples, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ (Mt 11:28-29).”

I cannot remember how many times I have lain at the foot of the Lord’s cross, the burden of what has weighed most heavily on me in my ministry: my fatigue, my exhaustion, my infidelities, and sometimes my discouragement or sadness, as well as difficult personal or community situations. I have always tried not to work relentlessly, stumbling over the obstacles I encountered, but to remember my vocation. An African proverb says, “When you don’t know where you’re going, go back to where you came from.” After 25 years, it is still good and necessary to remember our calling, to look back on our history of grace with the Lord, to sit down and open the photo album of the graces I have experienced with Him since I arrived at the MSC. In all that I have experienced, I have refused to dwell on this or that difficulty, but I have remembered that the Lord does not abandon me. He has never abandoned me or let me down. Thus, with the psalmist, I can sing my song of praise, for ‘his mercy is everlasting’ (Ps 135). I am very grateful to God and to the Congregation. Gratitude is always a ‘powerful weapon’. When I look back on my past in the Congregation, I can truly appreciate all the gestures of love, generosity, solidarity, and trust, as well as the forgiveness, patience, endurance, and compassion I have received, which have renewed me in my mission.

I was confronted with various temptations specific to that moment: stirring up ideas, not paying enough attention to the problem, giving too much importance to the persecutors... And it seems to me that the worst temptation I experienced was to stay there ruminating on my grief [...] Often, I dreamed of the ‘onions of Egypt’ and forgot that the promised land was in front of me, not behind me. I sometimes forgot that the promise was made yesterday, but it was for the future. I gave in to the temptation to close myself off and isolate, defending my approaches, which were ultimately nothing more than beautiful monologues.



I therefore understood that if we remain stuck in this memory that suffers and ruminates, we are not taking care of our spiritual health. These words of Pope Francis, who said: ‘Do not contract spiritual Alzheimer’s, do not lose your memory [...] every day, renew the feeling that everything is free, and ask for the grace not to lose your memory, not to feel important,’ helped me a lot during my stay in the desert. (Speech, 8 July 2015).

I would like to hear again: ‘The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged.’ “ (Deut 31:8) This grateful memory is fundamental to living my mission: recognizing God’s footprints in my personal history, my family’s history, my Congregation’s history, and the history of the UAF (Union of French-speaking Africans), and finding the traces of what God has accomplished, giving thanks. Like the apostles who never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts —‘It was about the tenth hour’ (Jn 1:39) —I, too, cannot forget the day of my profession; it was June 2 in Pretoria, South Africa, with nine of my companions.

## 2. Take courage

This jubilee is also a time to take courage on the road, to gather strength so that we can set out again, to renew my courage of commitment to religious life, which is above all the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s action in my life.

What strengthens me as an MSC? What keeps me here when there are only three of us left out of the nine? Father E.J. Cuskelly, in his book *A New Heart and a New Spirit*,



said: “The fact that we have remained in the congregation does not give us the right to conclude that we are faithful. We cannot say that we are automatically faithful because we have not left. Those who are faithful to their vocation are those who take it up and embrace it day after day, in the difficult tasks and constant demands of self-denial that this vocation entails. Only one thing: “I was treated with mercy”, “we were treated with mercy” (1 Tim 1:12-16).”

I often ask myself: Is my mission as an MSC religious in itself a witness to God’s mercy? He does not call those who are worthy, but those whom he likes, or as St Paul says: ‘God shows mercy to whom he wants, and he has pity on whom he wants’ (Epistle to the Romans, chap. IX, v. 15 and 16)

I continue to believe that God has never broken his covenant with me, even though I have broken it countless times. This invites me to celebrate 25 years of God’s faithfulness, who continues to trust me, believe in me, and take risks, despite my limitations and sins, and invites me to do the same. I have often felt that, beyond my weaknesses and sins, God has always allowed me to lift my head and start again, with a tenderness that has never disappointed me. I have consistently recognized my fragility, yes, but I have allowed Jesus to transform it and push me again and again towards the mission. I have never lost the joy of feeling like a ‘sheep’, of knowing that he is my Lord and my Shepherd.

This jubilee makes me understand that I am sent with the awareness of being a forgiven MSC. And that is the source of my joy.

## 3. Renewing our yes

Finally, this jubilee is also a time to renew my response to God’s call through the Church, to be sent out again on mission, like Peter, who heard Jesus say to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’ Today, after 25 years, Jesus asks me again: Do you want to be my MSC disciple? Do you want to be my friend? Do you want to ‘be the heart of Jesus on earth’? Do you want to be a witness to my Gospel? Do you wish to renew this irresistible attraction to your Lord?

Like Saint Peter, transfigured by this renewed call, I want to renew my response to God’s call, so that I can transmit the missionary spirit to the people of God entrusted to me, first and foremost in my community.

I want to hear the call of Jesus again, the one I heard more than 30 years ago, who wants to use me after all that I have already experienced with Him, to send me on a mission. “One day in June, I said “yes”, a “yes” that was born and grew within the MSC communities of South Africa, the United States, Cameroon, Congo Kinshasa and Senegal, which showed me with simple faith that it was worth giving everything, leaving everything for the Lord and his Kingdom. A “yes” whose meaning has had and will continue to have, I believe, such an inconceivable importance that I often cannot imagine all the good it has done and can do. At the age of 25, I am once again experiencing this choice of love that has been made for me, as the Lord did with

Saint Peter when he asked him, after all those years spent with him: Do you love me more than these?’ My motivation to continue evangelizing is the love of Jesus that I have received as a sign of ‘reparation for love’; it is the experience of having been saved by Him that drives me to love Him more and more. Yes, at 25 years old, I can say without hesitation that it is sweet to be in front of a crucifix, or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, standing at the foot of the cross next to the Virgin Mary, and sim-

ply under her gaze! How good it has been for me that He has touched my life and that He urges me to communicate His new life.

In this renewed call, Jesus entrusts His flock to me, sends me to care for His sheep; He wants to use me to draw ever closer to His beloved people.

I pray that this jubilee will be a time when Jesus renews my heart, so that I may ‘renew my yes with enthusiasm, with passion.’ **Jean Marie NDour, MSC (Senegal)**

## *A historic first for the Congregation*

**Father General and the four members of the General Team within the walls of the Union of Francophone Africa (UAF).** From 11 February to 17 March 2025, the Union of French-speaking African Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (UAF) experienced an unprecedented event in its history: the visit of Father Abzalón Alvarado Tovar, Superior General of the Congregation, accompanied by four of his advisors (except for Brother Bernard, who remained in Rome). It was the first time that such a delegation had visited this entity of the Congregation, marking a significant milestone in the life of the UAF. This historic visit was structured into three stages, corresponding to the three districts that comprise the UAF.

I want to focus here on the stage that took place in the Congo District, where I had the opportunity to be present. Two advisors, Fathers Gene and Bram, arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday, 11 February 2025. Their mission continued until Tuesday, 4 March 2025, when they returned to Rome. Father General joined them on Saturday, 22 February.

From 13 to 19 February, Father Bram, accompanied by Father Antoine Khuzi Abambe, Superior of the Congo District, visited the confreres in the Tshuapa region. They travelled through Boende, Bokungu and Mondombe, where they also met the local bishop, Monsignor Tous-saint Iluku, MSC. The confreres from Yalusaka converged on Mondombe to participate in this fraternal meeting.

At the same time, Father Gene, guided by Father Didier Mbe-la, District Councillor, visited the Mbandaka area. Several moments marked this visit, including a warm meeting with Archbishop Ernest Ngboko Ngombe, CICM, Archbishop of Mbandaka-Bikoro. They also made an enriching excursion to Iyonda with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. One of the most moving moments was the celebration of Sunday Mass in Lingala at the parish of Saint Paul the Apostle in Mbandaka III, which was celebrated with simplicity and fervour, marking Father Gene’s first Mass in the DRC. This recalls a significant precedent: Father Abzalón himself celebrated Palm Sunday Mass in Lingala in Matete/Kinshasa in 2019. Other highlights punctuated this stage, notably the solemn Mass at the parish of Sainte Marie Madeleine

in Kinshasa, attended by many members of the large Chevalier family. At the end of this Mass, all the confreres present in Kinshasa gathered for a fraternal meeting on Sunday, 2 March, celebrated by Father Désiré Mbomba, MSC. The next day, Father Gene had a special exchange with the members of the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Father General then travelled to Yaoundé, the headquarters of the UAF, where he was joined by two other members of his team, Father Chris Chaplin and Brother Simon Lumpini, after their mission in Senegal.

I experienced this visit as a moment of great joy and deep communion. Not only because it was a first for our entity, but above all because of the attitude of those in charge: they wanted, in a concrete way, to immerse themselves in the reality of our lives, to hear our joys, our sorrows, our aspirations. Father General said it clearly during our meeting in Matete: ‘We have not come only for consultations with a view to appointing a future superior of the UAF, but above all to meet you and talk with you.’

It was an open and sincere dialogue in a spirit of synodality. The confreres were able to ask all their questions, including those that touched on sensitive subjects, such as





the structural future of the UAF. The discussions made it clear that nothing had been decided: the options remain open — one province? Two? Three? Now is the time to listen and discern.

This participatory approach is to be commended. As Nelson Mandela said: ‘What is done for us, which others have decided without us, is in reality against us.’ The General Council’s approach has avoided this pitfall. It does, however, commit us to assuming our share of co-responsibility. What do we want to do with our entity? What is our vision for the future of the UAF? These questions challenge us all.

The visit of the Generalate team, in this jubilee year, assumes a strong symbolic dimension: it is a sign of encouragement, communion, and renewal. It invites us to re-read our mission in the light of faith and in a spirit of hope. Thanks to this fraternal presence, we feel strengthened in our vocation and called to continue, together, on our journey towards greater unity, growth and mission. Thank you to Father Abzalón and his advisors for their listening, closeness, and commitment. This visit will remain engraved in our hearts as a significant turning point in the life of the UAF.

**Grévisse Bokuma Mopongo, MSC (Congo)**

## *A story from the Heart*

At a time when the neighbourhoods of Bogotá were flourishing like ears of corn in the wind, and houses were being built on ancient savannahs with the same fervour as that with which prayers are raised to heaven, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus arrived. They brought with them neither riches nor power, but something more revolutionary: a living faith and an overflowing love for the people. That is why we can say that the history of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (M.S.C) in Colombia is a story of faith, commitment, and service. Since their arrival in the country, these missionaries have sown hope in needy communities, accompanying the faithful spiritually and working tirelessly to build parishes that are now models of community life.

In 1967, in response to the demographic expansion of the Kennedy neighbourhood in Bogotá, then Cardinal Luis Concha Córdoba (1891-1975) called on several religious congregations to support the establishment of new parishes. Among them, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of the United States responded decisively, accepting the challenge of forming a new community in an area that was rapidly growing from 77,000 inhabitants to over a million.

The Missionaries settled in the parish of Santa Margarita María de Alacoque, in Kennedy. In August 1967, they were legally granted the land and the deed to commence the project, although they had to submit a 10-year development plan, which included constructing a church before the end of that same year. Thanks to the efforts of Father Thomas Hayden, M.S.C., and the support of the community, work commenced on a building that served as both a chapel and accommodation. In 1968, a library was added, and in 1969, the building that now serves as the parish social centre was constructed. Around



1971, a third building with classrooms, a kitchen, and bathrooms was inaugurated, providing greater capacity for pastoral activities.

[1] He was a Colombian Cardinal of the Catholic Church, Archbishop of Bogotá and Primate of Colombia.. [2] Bogotá currently has a population of approximately 7,968,095 inhabitants. The town of Kennedy, in particular, has a population of 1,035,224 inhabitants, representing 12.99% of the total population of Bogotá.

During those early years, the spaces were used intensively for catechesis, marriage preparation courses, scout groups, family services, retreats, and cooking and sewing classes. Rooms were even lent to families affected by floods, demonstrating that the mission was both spiritual and social. At the same time, the population grew steadily, increasing the need for a larger church. The original chapel could only seat 150 people, which contrasted sharply with the massive attendance at liturgical celebrations. Therefore, the construction of a new church with a capacity for more than 800 people was proposed as a symbol of living faith and commitment to future generations. Despite limited resources, work commenced with funds raised through bazaars, raffles, and donations, with hopes of completing it in three years. However, it took thirty years and was inaugurated in October 2006. The project was seen as an opportunity to unite the community around a common goal.

Over the years, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart expanded their presence to other regions of the country. In 1968, they took over the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Cali, bringing their missionary charism to southwestern Colombia. Later, they became involved in Cumaca, in the parish of La Milagrosa, and in Tibacuy, in the parish of Santa Lucía, courageously responding to pastoral challenges across diverse cultural contexts. Back in Bogotá, they also supported the communities of the parish of Juan Rey, establishing a close and committed presence in the capital's popular neighbourhoods. In the Cauca Valley, they took over the parish of Nuestra Señora del Sagrado Corazón in Jamundí, strengthening their evangelising efforts in a region rich in human resources but also facing many needs.

Today, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart community remains active in Bogotá, particularly in the parish of Santa Margarita María de Alacoque, located in Kennedy. There, Father Hugo León MSC serves as the parish priest, with Father Ricardo Perdomo MSC as vicar, and both Father Germán Barona MSC and Juan Pablo Romero MSC as residents, continuing the pastoral work with the same spirit of the founding mission. Additionally, the Julio Chevalier Seminary, which trains new generations of Missionaries, is situated in Chapinero, Bogotá. Under the guidance of Father Miguel Piamba MSC, four seminarians are diligently preparing to follow in the footsteps of the founder, Father Julio Chevalier.

The missionary presence also extends to Soacha, where Father Tito Medina MSC and Deacon Antonio Posadas MSC serve in the Divino Niño parish, sharing the message of the Gospel with a community facing significant social challenges. In Fusagasugá, Fathers Darío Moreno MSC and Raúl Pérez Valdéz MSC foster pastoral life at the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish, nurturing fraternity and promoting the spirituality of Christ's open heart.

On the other hand, Fathers Luis Alfonso Segura MSC and Favio Castro Andino MSC are currently on a mission in the United States, representing the Colombian community of Missionaries in international contexts and strengthening ties with the global Church.

In summary, the history of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Colombia is a tale of a community that has consistently remained devoted to the work of the Kingdom of God, characterised by patient faith, generous commitment, and a profound trust in the love of the Heart of Jesus.

**Ricardo Pérdomo Arambulo, MSC (Colombia)**

## *An Intercultural Community in Belgium (ICB)*

Our story began a number of years ago when the Provincial sought to establish an Intercultural Community in Belgium. Four individuals were invited to join the endeavour: Martin Eloundou Eloundou from Cameroon, Sathish Anthony Swamy (known as Clement by everyone) from India, Epeli Lutua Soqe from Fiji, and Mark Van Beeumen from Belgium.

The first three completed a course to master the language, which is easier for one than for another. After learning Flemish and a thorough preparation period, during which the four decided what to do and where to live, we found a house in a more disadvantaged neighbourhood called Kiel, on the edge of Antwerp, which we rent from Caritas Catholica. We chose to live in a regular house rather than a monastery or presbytery to be closer to the community. The focus of the project was on community building; this includes our own religious MSC community as well as the wider community. The approach for this was through a Ministry of Presence.



The four members work in very different ministries. Martin serves as the parish priest at the Walburgis Church in the city and is responsible for the French-speaking African community across the entire Antwerp Diocese. He has a full church every week, especially on feast days, with attendees from Cameroon, the DRC, Ivory Coast, Burundi,





Senegal, Togo, and Benin. Occasionally, confreres and other priests join in the celebrations.

Apart from his sacramental work, he also supports couples, families, young people, refugees, and asylum seekers, and he engages in many other activities related to the devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. In addition, he celebrates Mass at the local Carmelite convent and at the cathedral once a week. Martin also serves as the current community superior, a role known as ‘Bridge builder.’

The other three community members chose not to take on full-time parish ministry but rather assist the parishes by celebrating masses when requested. Clement and Epele work in the neighbourhood. Clement engages with the local youth, who come from diverse nationalities. Being an excellent sportsman, he can often be found at the parks playing basketball or football with the youngsters and kids, trying to build good rapport with them. He also volunteers at the food bank run by people from the local parish and is a member of the Belgian Provincial Council, as well as serving as the community bursar.

Epeli works with elderly people in the area and visits those who are lonely and those in care homes. Together with some locals, they set up an organisation that cares for the sick and elderly. Mark serves as Chaplain in the prison in Antwerp. The bishop also asked him to work in the ‘drugs world.’ Every week, Epeli and he go to a drop-in centre for the homeless and people with drug-related issues. Mark also works with the so-called “Open Heart Movement,” the association of the Belgian MSC-Lay associates.

Clement, Epeli, and Mark are also involved in local projects, such as participating in a communal garden where people from the neighbourhood cultivate crops together. They volunteer with some community-serving charities, most of which are secular organisations. Epeli and Clement are gifted musicians and singers. Accompanied by Mark’s beautiful voice, we sometimes play and sing at events and when we’re asked to celebrate Mass in a church.

Since we handle all the house chores ourselves—cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, and so on—along with our ministries, life can get very busy. And, of course, there’s

time for prayer and celebrating the Eucharist, which we begin our day with.

The ICB House in Kiel is always open to anyone who wants to visit, whether they are confreres, family, friends, colleagues, or individuals in need of assistance. It is always encouraging to hear people’s appreciation when we meet them or when they invite us.

Of course, not everything goes smoothly all the time. We all come from different cultures and have very different personalities. For effective community building, honest communication is essential. Therefore, we started having monthly community meetings. The biggest challenge was the existence of two different visions about what community is. One vision is “community building inwards and from there pastoral outwards.” This approach begins with caring for each other within the MSC community, and from there, we care for people in the broader community. The other vision starts directly from “pastoral outreach.” Here, the emphasis is on the community being the people we work with. It is challenging to reconcile these two visions, and this sometimes leads to tensions. But as we read in our Constitutions (33): “True community does not come all about at once. It grows by God’s grace and the constant effort of each member. It needs to be built up each day into a community of faith and love, by prayer and the Eucharist, by listening to and sharing the Word of God. At the same time, it needs to be built up as a human community, knit together by fraternal relationships, where each member brings in his talents and knows that he is recognised, accepted, heard, encouraged and challenged.”

**Martin Eloundou Eloundou msc (Cameroon)**

**Sathish Anthony Swamy msc (India)**

**Epeli Lutua Soqe msc (Fiji)**

**Mark Van Beeumen msc (Belgium)**

## UAF Conference in Cameroon



# Safeguarding and Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults Seminar

The Archdiocese of Cebu, Philippines, conducted its second archdiocesan-wide seminar on the safeguarding and protection of minors and vulnerable adults on May 20, 2025. This full-day activity featured Rev. Fr. John Era, CM, as our speaker. The archdiocese divided the clergy into three groups, each assigned different dates: one in the central part of the archdiocese, another in the southern part, and a third in the northern part. Attendance

was made mandatory for all clergy, both religious and diocesan, by the mandate of His Excellency Jose S. Palma, DD, the Archbishop of Cebu.

The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the Cebu and Camotes districts actively participated in the safeguarding seminar as part of our commitment and pledge to provide a safe environment for our young people and vulnerable adults.

**Benidz Tumol, MSC (Philippines)**



## Chrism Mass

On April 16, 2025, in the Cathedral of Saint Catherine of Siena in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the Most Rev. Bishop Alfred A. Schlert presided over the Annual Chrism Mass. During the Mass, the Jubilee Mass for the priests was held, and the anniversaries of their ordinations were acknowledged. Frs. E. Michael Camilli, MSC, who managed to attend the celebration, is commemorating his 65th year as a priest, having been ordained on July 3, 1960. There was also a list of deceased clergy, noting Fr. Joe Glexiner, who passed away on March 1, 2024. The Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Oil of Chrism are blessed, with the Bishop consecrating only the latter. Frs. Michael Miller, Steve Boland, John Andrew Torma, John Schweikert, Tom Burns, Vince Freeh, Michael Miller, Steve Boland, John Schweikert, Andrew Torma, Tom Burns, Vince Freeh, and Jonas Tandayu took part in the Chrism Mass.

**Warren Perrotto, MSC (USA)**

## Spiritual retreat

Spiritual retreat for MSC and FNDSC members from the provinces of France and Switzerland Issoudun, 12–18 May 2025. This retreat was a great experience of communion between our congregations. It was a spiritual, fraternal and family break in a calm atmosphere conducive to rejuvenation. The community of the FNDSC Mother House welcomed us very warmly. What could be better than a spiritual retreat between MSC and FNDSC to regain initiative and enjoy a new rhythm?

To take a few days away from the daily routine for reflection on one's missionary and community life, as well as one's doubts and faith. To focus one's gaze and words on the Sacred Heart to be more freely open to hope. The daily moments of prayer, the teachings received, and the memories of encounters continue to accompany us.

May NDSC assist us, amidst the many voices that rise each day, to discover his call to 'go forth,' to overcome the fears and uncertainties of our current realities, and to be joyfully available to BE THE HEART OF GOD ON EARTH.

**Jean Noël FAYE, MSC (Senegal)**



## PROFESSIONS AND ORDINATIONS (April-June 2025)

### PERPETUAL VOWS

Name	Entity	Date
Tadeo Camaitoga, Julson Ribauw, Babetara Anetoka, Buroro Tekai	Pacific Islands	05.05.2025
Martin and Ajith Kumar	India	20.05.2025
Kingala Mbo Auguste Emmanuel, Dinwang Gasso Alexandre, Ouedradogo Yabre Patinnewende Landry, Ngimbi Pambu Jevic	UAF	20.05.2025

### DIACONATE ORDINATION

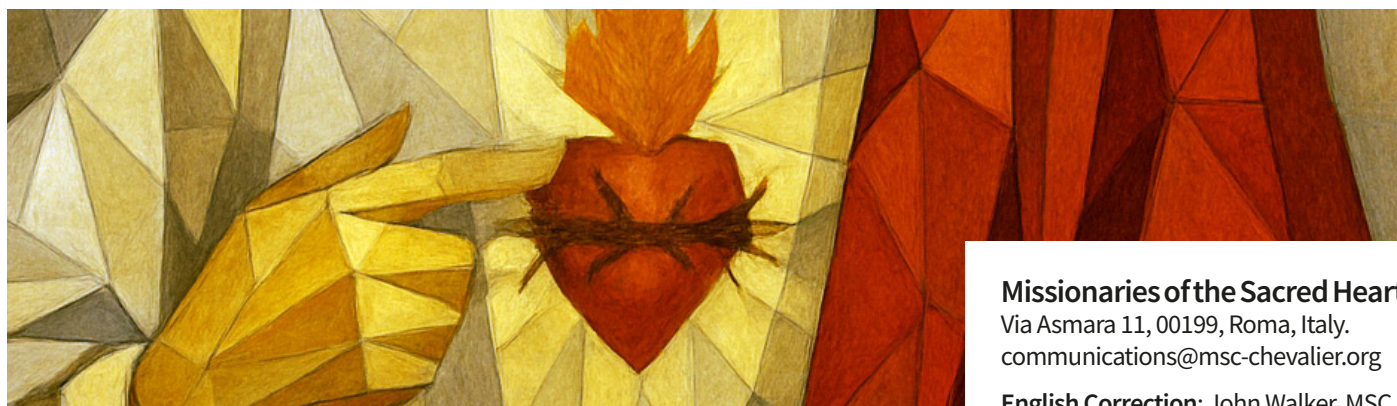
Name	Entity	Date
Edgar Aníbal Cordero Ordoñez	Central America & Mexico	18.04.2025
Aldiclei OLIVEIRA LIMA	São Paulo	08.04.2025
Mathew and Gudime Balu	India	20.05.2025
Yohanes Esserey, Yohanes Jeng, Argonius Forkas, Belly Yoakhim Resubun, Claudio Engelberts Tumbel, Yofalandus Litong Taa, Petrus Eki Lehalima, Jenner Bernardus Senduk	Indonesia	20.05.2025
Danao Primitivo Jr (Parpan), Pelare Franz Kim (De la Rosa), Reyes, John Erwin (Mijares), Carpenteros, Diomuel (Romero)	Philippines	05.06.2025

### PRIESTHOOD ORDINATION

Name	Entity	Date
Thomas Neles Babaubun & Devid Fransiskus Abram	Indonesia	23.04.2025
Ronie (Mosca) Botona	Philippines	23.04.2025
Èric Disney Ngagoum Kengne, Jean Jacques Florian Nongassida Valea, Romain Danem	UAF	05.05.2025

## NECROLOGIUM (Deceased members from April-June 2025)

Name	Province	Date	Place
Michael Fallon	Australia	17.04.2025	Douglas Park
Raymond Michael Lievre	France	30.04.2025	Issoudun
Adeodato Carollo	Italy	06.05.2025	Minturno
Noel Mansfield	Australia	16.05.2025	Douglas Park
Kevin Ehlefeldt	Australia	24.05.2025	Douglas Park
Gerrit Theodorus Josephus Janssen	Nederlands	11.06.2025	Tilburg
Horst Kubina	North Germany	-	-



**Missionaries of the Sacred Heart**  
Via Asmara 11, 00199, Roma, Italy.  
[communications@msc-chevalier.org](mailto:communications@msc-chevalier.org)  
**English Correction:** John Walker, MSC





Missionaries of  
the Sacred Heart