



Special Edition – Spring 2020

26th March 2020

Dear confreres,

Just a few months ago we listened to the news that was coming to us from Africa and saw what was unfolding with heavy hearts: Ebola, flooding, locusts. The news also spoke of raging bushfires in Latin America and Australia. Today Europe is at the epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic. The invisible enemy surrounds us. It is so close and strikes without regard to either geographical borders or the social status of individuals. A heavy silence has settled on our planet, stirring up anxiety and vertigo.

We have been given directives by civil and religious authorities. Let us follow them. Our health and that of others depends on this. The great majority of us belong to this category of « fragile and vulnerable persons ». It is therefore essential to be prudent and disciplined. We have no choice. It is a question of absolute necessity, of a strict civic and humanitarian duty.

That being said, let us not waste our time. We are facing a deluge of calls to solidarity, spiritual communion, of paying attention to the weakest in society. Allow words of comfort and hope to pour out from keyboards and telephones and above all from our prayer. Together and in communion with the Church this Lent let us build up a brotherhood of the desert. Let us implore the Lord to protect and help countries that are poor or in a state of war. That is also our missionary responsibility.

Finally, as we are living a life of almost solitary confinement, let us profit by it to take stock of our own lives and find ourselves again. In the journal, *La Vie*, Charles Wright writes: « *The monks recognise it clearly: being anchored in one's cell is the condition for migrating towards the inner man, for travelling towards the discovery of the depths of the soul and uncovering the vastness that is in our being* ». Let us go!

Your brother,

G rard Chabanon

Some news from the Province and the Sectors.

We thank the provincial Delegates who sent on news of their sectors. There is no point in repeating everything one can find in the papers about restrictions imposed by various governments. These are much the same everywhere. Nor do we need to repeat the recommendations on how to protect ourselves from Covid-19. We know what they are and are putting them into practice.

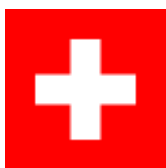


From Irlanda - 20 March

Greetings from Dublin. All the confreres are well as I write but the Corona virus is making rapid progress in the country. The reaction of the Templeogue community has been to follow the instructions of the Government. Simple things but not so simple as all that. I remember being reprimanded for wiping my nose in my sleeve!!!

We have taken some practical steps: we have tried to reduce our contact with the outside world to a minimum. Our staff (cooking, laundry etc.) still come to work. However we have cancelled our 8.00 morning Mass for our neighbours. We have asked confreres not to socialise too much and not to visit their families. In the house there is the problem of keeping a safe distance. We have put a limit of two people at table for meals. We celebrate the Eucharist in our Chapel thus giving more space to the confreres. We use the intinction method for consuming the Eucharist. We are praying but it is not the same when there is a gap in the bench/chair beside you. All our instincts are to go out and visit vulnerable neighbours but that is also denied to us. God bless

Ian Buckmaster



From Switzerland – 21 March


Hello, The Swiss sector is doing well at the moment. We do not have any patients with the virus yet, but Jean-Marie Gabioud is in hospital after a chemotherapy which weakened him to the point that he could no longer eat. Our late lamented Hansjörg Gyr died last Tuesday of a death which delivers him from the sufferings he endured for months at the Foyer of Sierre.

We are, proportionally to the population, the 2nd most affected country in Europe after Italy. Holy masses in public are suppressed, churches remain however open, but as the people accustomed to go and pray in a church are mostly elderly people, they stay home since people over 65 have been invited to avoid going out. The measures to be taken against this pandemic are the ones we are trying as far as possible to follow here in our communities. But let us point out to you a site that allows you to make a personal test to reassure yourself that you have not been contaminated! Here is the site: [coronacheck.ch](https://www.coronacheck.ch)

Wishing you the hope the Risen Christ invites us to keep.
 United with you in thoughts and prayers and in solidarity with the whole world.

Raphaël Deillon

 **From Heythuysen - 23 March**

 In Heythuysen we live in a kind of semi quarantaine. Nobody is ill, but the authorities are serious in trying to prevent the virus to spread, especially in a place like ours where 90 people live under one roof and are all over 80 (except 5 WF). Different decisions were made at different times.

Since Sunday 15th March, the confreres, and also the other residents, get the meals served in their apartments. This means that everyone eats apart, not any more together. When the hot meal is served at noon, we get also the bread, butter, cheese and whatever needed for the evening meal and for breakfast. Milk, fruit juice and fruit are also distributed according to one's wishes.

Tuesday 17th March: this is the last day we used the chapel for common prayers like Eucharist and Vespers. From now on, everyone prays individually. The chapel can be used for personal prayer, but one is asked to keep distance of 1-2 meters.

Thursday 19th: the funeral of Jan van Haandel. We celebrate the Eucharist in our chapel with only the confreres present. Some 3 members of the family join us in the cemetery for the actual burial. We have decided to have a proper memorial service once the situation will have improved.

That's how the situation is now. The confreres are taking it well, but find it difficult to understand and are sometimes nervous. Even if we don't meet in common places, we keep an eye on each other. Those who need help by meals are visited by a confrere. The medical care is still going on.

Our confreres outside Heythuysen are doing well.

We are keeping well and we are praying in union with the entire world.

Keep well and stay healthy, as we say here nowadays.

Jozef de Bekker

  **From France – 24 March**

Dear everybody.

Just like the rest of you we are all confined to barracks, some more than others. The two communities of Bry and Billère are hermetically sealed! As for the other houses, going out is limited to doing the shopping and taking an hour's walk at most in the immediate neighbourhood. But since Mours has the good fortune of having extensive grounds, the confreres can work and take a walk there.

Five confreres have died since the 27th of February : Jean Yves Chevalier, René Januel, Maurice Redoin, Louis Faivre Rampant et Jean Claude Ceillier. Only one of them was over 90 ! But none of them died of Coronavirus. The first two had a normal funeral, but then the restrictive measures kicked in, so that the others were buried with only a very few mourners present. Jean Claude and Maurice were buried on the same day in Bry sur Marne. We will have a commemoration ceremony for them at a future date.

We have some confreres who are sick. The one who preoccupies us the most is Pierre Lafolie who has been infected with coronavirus and is in hospital at Pontoise. (N.B. Pierre actually died on the 26th of March). The Mours community that he was part of is living therefore in strict confinement, the confreres getting their meals in their rooms. They appear to be living quite peacefully like this. A lady doctor monitors them. Joannes Liogier is in hospital in Paris following a gall bladder operation and is getting better. In Billère Jean Longin, who is 99 and a half, fractured his hip. He is bedridden and weak but otherwise well.

Otherwise everyone is adapting to the situation and following to the letter the instructions given by the government. The telephone is working – and the computer also!

We remain united in prayer on this vigil of the Annunciation.

Fraternally!

Patrick Bataille



From Germany – 25 March

I have just carried out a survey of the state of health of our confreres in the different communities of our sector. Thanks to the great God, right now no one has been affected by coronavirus.

On the other hand, some confreres are sick: some days ago Johannes Tappeser was registered in a house of palliative care here in Cologne and, fully conscious, is preparing himself to go to the Father. Pray with us for him !

Gothard Rosner was in an artificial coma for three weeks and has just come out of it a few days ago. Right now he is able to breathe without a machine, but with an incision in the windpipe. That means he can no longer speak. Please let us not forget him in our prayers!

Each community has met in order to agree on how everyone should act following the recommendations of the government and dioceses.

Within our communities we continue to celebrate the Eucharist without allowing anyone from outside to take part and for the time being our communities have no visits from outside. Journeys and leaving the house are reduced to a minimum in order to avoid close contact with other people. On the other hand, going for a walk alone or with a companion in order to get a bit of fresh air is acceptable.

A confrere who is pastorally active in a big parish told me that this is a blessed time for him: now at last he has time to read, to meditate and make a good Retreat all alone. Isn't that an example to imitate!

Rudi Pint



From Belgium – 25 March

Apart from the coronavirus crisis, in Belgium we are faced with a crisis of government. For the last six months we have been expecting the political parties to form a government. The appearance on the scene of the coronavirus crisis has forced them at least to put in place a crisis government able to respond to the challenges presented by coronavirus... And it seems to be working somehow. Once this crisis Government was in place, a whole raft of measures were proclaimed to try to prevent the coronavirus spreading too much. The people themselves are pretty clear about what must be done. The great majority follow the instructions given as a matter of urgency. We, Missionaries of Africa, through our formation have somehow learned to obey. The confreres are wise. In community they help each other to recognise that this crisis must be handled wisely.

As of now, it would appear, no confrere has been infected with coronavirus. Those who are in a retirement home are confined to their rooms and do not receive visitors. As of now we do not exchange visits between communities. However we do avail of the modern means of communication.

A further question is the handling of the group of service personnel coming from outside. Some of them cannot come to work for one reason or another... In spite of some of them being absent at times and with a little bit of gymnastics we manage to handle the work somehow and the various needs of the community. The different communities have to find their own solutions and be flexible when one or even several employees cannot come over a set period.

We bring our personal and community prayer to bear on all our efforts to handle this situation and our community harmony wisely. This strange time we are in forces us to live with even greater solidarity and to rediscover the human and spiritual values we are in danger of forgetting if not losing.

Luc Putzeys



From Italy – 26 March

We are in a war and we are at war. I think this is the simplest way to sum up the dramatic situation that the country is going through, especially the region of Lombardy, where our sector house and the residence for the elderly is situated.

Our two communities are among those groups of people considered at risk because of old age and various ailments. Because of that we have introduced a series of

measures to protect ourselves from within and from without. The social distancing within happens at table, in the chapel and in our common rooms. The one without trying to go out as little as possible and not receiving any visitors. Thank goodness we have a large ground both in Treviglio and in Castelfranco, so those of us who want can get out and stretch their legs without having to leave the premises.

It's impossible to have a zero risk situation because some of us have to go out to buy food and medicines or for serious emergencies (Gaetano Cazzola travelled some 200 km to his birthplace for his mother's funeral). We also depend on people for some basic services in the house and for the care of those confreres who need assistance.

The remarkable feat so far is that none of us has been ill and nobody has shown any sign of the problems caused by the virus. Even our confrere Michele Vezzoli who spent three weeks at the nearby hospital was discharged 2 weeks ago testing negative and he is now recovering at home. Two of his hospital room mates died with the virus.

We try to live a life as normal as possible though the situation around us is insane. We are lucky to be able to gather around the Eucharist daily while the majority of our fellow countrymen have gone without the sacraments for 2, 3, some even for 4 weeks. We try to be in solidarity with all the initiatives taken by the universal Church and by the local bishops by following on TV and on the web moment of prayer and worship. In a sense we are making a monthly retreat and a real Lenten penance.

We have our meals together, we haven't completely lost our sense of humour and we make the most to celebrate life when the opportunity arises. Yesterday it was the feast of the Annunciation, today we celebrate Giovanni Castagna 84th birthday and Walter Gherri's oath anniversary. A prayer of thanksgiving, a song, glasses raised and life goes on, until we'll be able to taste once again what real life is all about.

Claudio Zuccala



From Spain – 26 March

As in many other countries, the health situation became rapidly worse in Spain and the government decreed a state of alarm for the whole country. The state of alarm means for us, above all, total confinement in our houses/residences, and an end to all outside activity. So, no pastoral activities, a halt to all activities with the immigrants in Roquetas de Mar, telecommuting only with Africa Fundación Sur.

Most Spaniards – including ourselves – have understood and accepted the restrictions that the government imposed on us. At this moment in time, Spain ranks third in the world in the number of those infected by coronavirus and who have died from it. The number of people who died from coronavirus is higher among older people in proportion to their number. That is especially true for people in nursing homes and retirement homes.

The Covid-19 crisis and sounding the alarm have also had a significant impact on two elements of our programme at Sector level: the annual Retreat and the Sector Council, both of them foreseen for the end of March and the beginning of April. Given the


situation of Covid-19 in Italy and the state of alarm in Spain, we are afraid that the visit to the Sector of the Assistant General Ignatius Anipu, scheduled for 14th to 28th of April, will have to be postponed until after the « storm ».

What of the confreres and our communities? Absolutely all of them have gumption. Up to this, we have not had a single case diagnosed positive, not even a trace of any symptom. And no one wants to be the first! We are sticking rigidly to the measures/restrictions imposed by the state of alarm which has swept over the whole country. And that includes everyone close to us.

Four weeks of almost solitary confinement at the beginning of spring...that is bound to be tough. It is our hope that our enforced monastic life, with a bit more « ora et labora » will help us finally to be safe and sound. Reflections and prayer intentions inspired by Covid-19 are built in to our daily prayer. We include all of you in this prayer. Fraternal greetings. Happy Easter !

Jesus Zubiria

From Poland – 26 March

 When the first case of coronavirus in Poland was reported on the 4th of March, all of us in our community were preparing for quite an intensive Lenten period. Bogus managed to finish preaching the Lenten retreat in a parish in the west of Poland, in fact were the first case of the virus was reported. Myself and Mariusz were in the middle of retreat for schools in Lublin, when on the 11th of March decision was taken to close the schools, universities and leisure places, for two weeks. So our recollection came to an abrupt stop. At the beginning there was a panic in the shops like everywhere in the world, people were buying out food stuff and toilet paper. It seems during these 3 days, people spent more money than on Christmas. Happily we made our shopping few days before.

The restriction came into power to limit the number of people in gatherings to 50. It affected also the church services. Episcopal conference advised people to stay home, especially the elderly. Upon insistence of the parish priest, Emmanuel went to preach Lenten retreat in one of the parishes, but there weren't many people attending. People took seriously the advice of the government. Different TV stations, websites, now started broadcasting Eucharist on Sunday, even those that are against the church, the hell froze over. After first Sunday, people shared their testimonies on the internet, how they started discovering what it means a domestic church and spiritual communion. It is interesting to see how pastoral activities shifted to the digital world of media. Now we have a selection of masses, devotions and Lenten talks, on TV, radio and internet. We cancelled all different activities in our house, open mass for friends and neighbours, planned weekend recollections for youth. We try to keep as much as possible at home. In the community we are four now, Mariusz, Emmanuel, Rafal and myself. Bogus is in a small parish in the south, writing his doctoral thesis. We joined the invitation to all the priest and religious, and we pray every day the rosary at 20.30

for the intention of sick, victims and health workers. On the 25th we prayed the “Our Father” in union with the pope.

Generally all towns in Poland look deserted, most of the people are taking things seriously. It will be like this up to Easter. It is really a special time of Lent, which will be remembered. We hope and pray that at Easter we will be able to sing a joyful Alleluia.

Pawel Mazurek



From Great-Britain – March

Like many other countries, we are in lockdown. All non-essential services and businesses have been closed down, including the Church. Here in Liverpool, our last public service was Stations of the Cross on Friday evening last week, to which a few of the people came. On Sunday we live-streamed Sunday Mass on Facebook and were surprised that 72 people logged on and followed us, when we usually only have 60 at Mass on Saturday evening!!

We have 4 communities, each doing its best to resist an infection. The largest community is hunkered down in Little Ealing Lane. Happily, no one has shown signs of a viral infection. However, on the previous Friday morning, Eddie Woo began the crisis with an emergency admittance to hospital after being found collapsed in his room. He had a nasty chest infection but it was not Covid 19. After a week in hospital, he was returned to the house. Unfortunately, however, his health is still giving cause for concern.

The community's other member in hospital, Peter Kelly, who had been in hospital for over a week at the beginning of the crisis, was eventually discharged directly to a nursing home, where a room had been kept for him even before his collapse.

The other members of the community are all doing as well as usual. The house is large and there is space, both inside and in the garden. Since the beginning of their isolation they have introduced a meeting every Wednesday for half an hour of adoration followed by a fraternal supper and short recreation time - to keep in touch. A new exercise bike on the top floor is proving to be a good buy. So they are comfortable and well cared for.

One confrere, John Slinger, is on home leave. He had decided to visit the community of Roquetas de Mar, where he had spent a few years. He came back to GB at the beginning of the emergency and could not be received at LEL. Happily the community found him accommodation in an apartment where he spent a week in quarantine. He has now moved in with his nephew in the countryside, safe from all infections. He will now have to wait for the end of the crisis in his nephew's house.

The community in Rutherglen may feel the crisis more acutely as they are more active pastorally. They have had to close their door to the daily participants at the Eucharist and the 30 or so who come regularly to Mass on Sunday. They are also used to receiving a number of visitors on a regular basis and this has been stopped. The staff of the house continue to care with great generosity for the brethren, although they

keep their “canonical” distance. Otherwise, they are all in reasonable health. There are two confreres attached to that community, both of whom are in nursing homes. Obviously, these homes have closed their doors to visitors and this must be frustrating for them. However, they too are being well cared for.

Corfton Road is also affected in that the appeals have had to be cancelled. The two confreres most involved in those, Michael Heap and John Gerrard, are now house-bound. The sisters of the convent where Ted Wildsmith is chaplain have decided not to have the daily Eucharist, which means that he has been able to take up permanent residence in the community.

In another initiative as a direct result of the crisis we have set up a WhatsApp Group for the superiors of the 4 communities. By this way, we can keep in touch – and keep the confreres in touch – of any developments and encourage each other and “share each others’ burdens”...

In Liverpool, we find ourselves unusually quiet. It is rare for us to have a full week when we are all at our meals and our daily prayers. Since the first week of the crisis, before we were told to close the church, we established a prayer rota at the church where one of us would be present before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for help with this crisis. A few people did join us for that. They can no longer come but we keep up the 4 hours of adoration, each of us taking an hour. We also invited the Christians to join us, wherever they may be, each evening at 6.30pm, in 30 minutes of prayer. We prepared a short programme of prayer for them to follow. We know that some of them appreciate this and are joining us. There will be a second edition of this prayer in this coming week.

Our Facebook page is a wonderful area of activity. Many people participate in it and the lady who manages it is doing sterling work, encouraging the parishioners at this difficult time.

We announced at the beginning of the lockdown that we were willing to help anyone who is alone at home and cannot get to the shops or hospital appointments. Some parishioners also volunteered to help us by driving or keeping in touch or doing the shopping. However, we have not yet been asked to intervene. When the Government put out an appeal for a similar volunteer scheme, to help the NHS cope with caring for those at home or in quarantine, over 500,000 people had signed up within the first 24 hours. This really is an indication of all the good will that is there waiting to be tapped. There are many signs of hope that should be given more light in the midst of this darkness, so that they can be encouraged and built upon at the end of this dreadful period. Certainly, neighbours are helping neighbours in a way they do not normally. The measures the government has taken to protect and support individuals and families, who would otherwise be rendered penniless by the close-down of all business activities, are signs of a willingness to act socially and for the good of the person rather than give priority to the economy. The huge improvement in air quality because of the absence of travel in cars and airplanes must not be ignored or forgotten at the end of this... Families are learning to live with each other again; to take time, to enter into conversation with each other, in a way that seemed to be forgotten. Our National

Health Service is once again proving its value and must never again be taken for granted or underfinanced.

There is much to be thankful for, even if we are all frightened and anxious about how we will come out of this; if, indeed, we will survive. And most of us will survive, thanks to the situation of the country in which we live: its good government, its law and order, its excellent health system, its economy and financial strength. We are very conscious that it is not the same for others across the world and that many of our brothers and sisters in Africa will not have the same outcome and same chance. We pray for them. We do not forget them, and we will work hard that they may one day arrive at the same level of security and stability so that we may all be equally equipped to live through such a crisis in the future.

Terry Madden



And the Provincial team

G rard just got back from Ireland on one of the last flights out, and here we are housebound like the rest of you. Has everyone found something to do? Didier managed to wrap up the financial reports for 2019. As the meeting of Sector bursars had to be cancelled, the approval of the Provincial report will have to be done by more modern means... Georges is preparing a

Retreat he is to give in Algeria in October. G rard remains in contact with the Sectors. We have had our recollection on interculturality and we individually take a walk in a nearby park. We are keeping in good health. Didier was to have heart surgery on the 2nd of April... which has been cancelled. We take care of one another.

N.B. Taking account of the confinement imposed in most of our countries, the Provincial Council which was due to take place in Paris from the 21st to the 24th of April has been put back to a later date.



« The streets were empty, the shops closed, people could not go out any more. But spring did not know that. The flowers began to blossom, the sun shone, the birds sang, the swallows would soon return, the sky was blue, every day morning broke earlier. It was March 2020. The young people had to study online and find something to do at home.

People could not go shopping any more or even go to the hairdresser. Soon there would be no bed free in the hospitals and people continued to fall sick

But spring was not aware that it was time for going into the garden, the grass was growing green. That was March 2020. The people were confined to their homes. That was to protect grandparents, families and children. No more getting together, no more meals together, no more family celebrations. A pall of real fear hung over the world; one day was like the next.

But spring was not aware that the apple trees, the cherry trees and the other fruit trees and shrubs had sprouted fresh leaves and blossomed. People began to read, enjoy family life, learn a new language, sang on the balcony, inviting the neighbours to do likewise. Yes, they learned a new language, that of solidarity with one another and discovering other values.

People realised the importance of health, of suffering. They faced a world that had come to an end, an economic system that had outlived its usefulness. But spring did not realise this. The flowers made way for fruit, the birds made their nests, the swallows duly arrived.

And then the day of liberation came. People learned of it on the telly. The virus had lost. People piled into the streets, singing, weeping, hugging their neighbours. No masks anymore; no gloves.

And all that was because summer had come, without spring realising it. And summer remained in spite of everything, in spite of the virus, fear and death. What spring did not realise was that it had shown people the power of life ». (Xavier Ernst)

Happy Easter!