

EUR ECHO

PROVINCE OF EUROPE - MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA

April 2021

Dear confreres,

A few days ago, the parks of Brussels were again covered with snow. The cold became bitter; but it did not last. The sunshine returned and the cobalt beauty of the sky quickly made you forget the pallor of the lawns. Our shoulders thawed in the gentle warmth of the sunlight.



The pandemic continues to invest our conversations with its sad consequences ... But the comfort of vaccination is already shining like rays of hope. Yes, soon we will rediscover the pleasure of face-to-face meetings, even though we will probably not be allowed to remove our masks right away.

Isn't that the Easter message...? Let's go to Galilee and take a good look... On the shore stands Jesus, a community meal ready to rejoice our hearts. *'If hope has made you walk further*

than your fear, your eyes will be lifted up. Then you can withstand the sunlight of God.'

Georges Jacques

Echoes of the latest Provincial Council

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Spring Provincial Council was once again held by videoconference.

Father Emmanuel Lengaigne offered us an attractive talk, putting forward the Sector of France for us and some great challenges for the Church. The average age of confreres in France is 83 (81 for PEP). How can we be missionaries today in Europe? We have to call on non-European confreres in order to last out here. Our prime missionary commitments represent the margins of society to which Pope Francis sends us. They present a lot of prospects. These commitments

give meaning to our presence in Europe. Our community life is a genuine witness to it. Through our testimony, we can help young people in France connect with Africa and experience it for themselves.

Each Delegate then presented his Sector, emphasising the development he has experienced since the last Provincial Council in December. Everywhere, we can see the progress of vaccination. It must be said that almost all of us are among those over the age of 65. There is also talk of restructuring everywhere, especially in Spain and Germany, where the move has been made towards the setting up of one of our communities in units more adapted to our needs. The other Sectors are not lacking, and the thought process has been launched.

The composition of the Provincial Team was also discussed at length. Some Sectors will soon be made up of just one community. This is already the case in three countries. Wouldn't an additional Assistant be necessary to take charge of the running of all these Sectors? Or shouldn't the Provincial Team be refreshed to give it more dynamism and energy? It is true that the pandemic has grounded us...

The Council then discussed at length the reports of the three stagiaires ending their stay in Europe: two in France and one in Spain. A few appointments also sparked long debates. Two new stagiaires are thus entrusted to us for the third stage of their training. TENTA Ernest WEMEODA (Togolese), who is at the Spiritual Year in Kasama, has been appointed to Marseille. YOBELE SYLVESTER (Tanzanian), also at Kasama, has been appointed to Great Britain, for Liverpool.

The Provincial Treasurer presented us with the balance sheet for 2020. The consolidated report of the PEP offers us a positive assessment thanks to the good management of the various Treasurers at all levels. Father José-Manuel Gordejuela has been appointed Delegate Treasurer of Spain for a second term.

We have noted the many requests addressed to us by the African Provinces for the needy. We asked ourselves whether a structure at the PEP level should be created to respond to these demands. The Financial Council of the PEP recommends that all these requests be addressed to the Solidarity Fund of the Society. This does not prevent confreres in Europe from helping individually. We therefore suggest that the Provinces do not send their requests to all the confreres, but only to senior confreres who once worked in the Provinces in question.

The next Provincial Council will be held at Brussels following the Pre-Capitular Assembly to be held from 13 to 16 September 2021.

Some news of the Province and Sectors



Ireland: Life in Ireland, as in the rest of the Province, has been dominated by the presence of Covid-19. Since March 2020, the community has been in virtual lockdown. In recent weeks, a law has been passed requiring people coming from over 70 countries to Ireland (including our Irish confreres on leave) to spend 14 days in compulsory quarantine in a hotel, which would cost them close to 2,000 Euros. This includes countries like France, Belgium, Italy and many African countries. The good news is that all confreres and domestic staff have been vaccinated.

The current situation also made us realise that our staffing situation was not suited to our needs. In consultation with the Provincial Council, it was decided to outsource our catering, laundry and housekeeping services. Sodexo will resume these services at the end of May.

Switzerland: A mantle of fresh snow covers the ground and the trees since early yesterday in Fribourg and since this morning in Veyras; but everywhere their vigorous inhabitants continue their activities.

In Veyras, we can see Oskar Geisseler leaving with his skis on his shoulder ready to take advantage of the last powdery snow. Aloïs Bingisser blows on his apple trees in bloom to avoid frost and a total loss of his autumn harvest in fruit and fermented juice. René Brossard supervises with a fraternal eye this small community, which lives peacefully, religiously, with a benign regard on its closest neighbours.

In Fribourg, the number of guests at the table varies according to the tasks of some, the commitments of others and the Delegate's movements. Roman Stäger, every Wednesday goes to 'Point d'ancrage' (Anchoring Point), the service for migrants and undocumented migrants. Claude Maillard is regularly asked to lend a hand to the priests of Fribourg and its surroundings. Clemens Nadler is the precise and valuable secretary and jack-of-all-trades in the house. Fortunately, mountain trips give him new energy every week. Brother Henri Renevey, our elder statesman, seems to resist advancing age philosophically, thanks to a radiant smile that we discover at every visit we make to his nursing home.



Raphaël Deillon, still wears two hats, that of Delegate of the Swiss Sector and that of Interfaith Dialogue representative by way of El Kalima and ARCRE. However, this last-mentioned hat has been removed since he left Belgium to visit the Swiss Sector and take a rest. He has just been asked by young Fribourg students to make a presentation of the Martyrs of Algeria, which you can consult by clicking on the following link: https://youtu.be/SE_HDKozO38

The snow is melting in the plain, the sun is shining on the white peaks, announcing a possible future for this Sector which is seeking its own identity. It must, however, fight with the virile men it has in its army, each soldier showing on his features a long and devoted spirit of 'backs to the wall.'

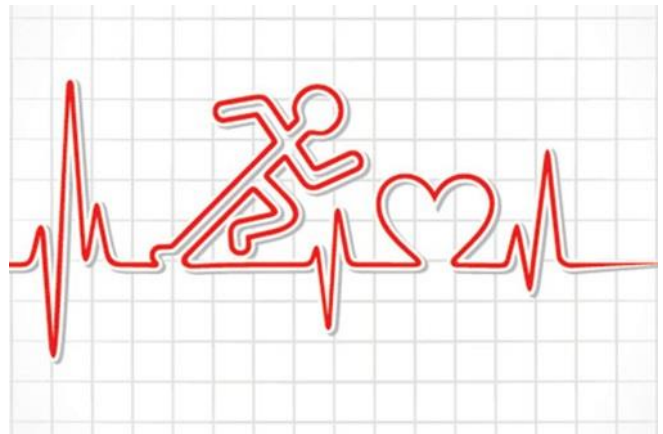


France: Taken from the 'Mini-Lien' of 1 April, this invitation is to stay young and fit and to maintain a sense of humour in a time of pandemic.

'To get us out of this time of anxiety, we learned that the CORREF (Conference of Men and Women Religious in France) has considered launching a kind of interfaith Olympic Games with all the Congregations in France. These festivities will take place in Paris before the Tokyo Olympics (23 July to 8 August), in order to have racetracks and other sites available in the capital. Not all sports will be represented. Here is the selection that was made: races (100m, etc.) marathon, walking, tennis, table tennis, swimming, cycling, bowls, chess and patience. (Draughts

was not included.) Everyone will need to register according to their age. There will be the 80s-100s split, then the 65s-80s, then the 40s-64s age groups.

To register, you will need to pay a deposit, which will soon be set, to purchase the sportswear that will bear the logo of the Congregation. A certificate from your GP must be presented before your pre-selection. For the winner, the hymn of the Congregation will be played. We hope to hear the *Sancta Maria* echo around often. For us White Fathers, we have found a place of preparation: Mours and its grounds and the swimming pool. Athletes will be selected after an 8-day retreat. We are still looking for the co-ordinator; but if any of you want to volunteer, let us know. The coach will be an army chaplain returning from Africa. For the opening of the games, each Congregation will wear its traditional habit. The important thing is to take part. I signed up for swimming (Michel Groiselle), so get to your starting blocks. This is what we can tell you so far, but you will find out more in the next Mini-Lien."



The Mini-Lien does not say if the 'non-natives' can register ... The dialogue has been begun, but let's start our training now!

From Belgium comes an account of the life of the Varsenare community: There is not much to say about Varsenare. The ducks solemnly navigate the crowded pond. A lot of people

come to walk with us. 'By the Fathers', they say. Every now and then, I also go for a walk, with a Zimmer frame. Sometimes, I have a chat with one or the other; and then there is our cemetery. Four hundred and twenty-six confreres await their resurrection there.

However, Varsenare is not just that. There is also a country house, inhabited by 17 confreres. The average age is around 85, of which 6 are over 90. Such a country house obviously requires a lot of maintenance. Fortunately, our thrifty Bursar loves maintenance. Our nurse is waiting for us every day when we leave the chapel on the way to the refectory. 'Querens quem devoret,' (...*seeking whom to devour...*) said a rogue. She really cares about the health of the 18 'lazybones' that we are.



However, let's look a little further. Next to our country house we have 'Avondrust', where three of our brothers are registered and where a member of our community is the chaplain. The Corona Serpent has put a spoke in the wheel, however, and the rules are more than very strict there. Visit? 'What's your name, sir?' 'What's your address, sir?' 'What is your phone number', sir? 'Who are you visiting, sir?' 'How long do you intend to stay with him, sir?'

As I said, there isn't much to say about Varsenare. Except what I told you now, of course.

Jan Anthonissen

Spain: As everywhere else, the coronavirus continues to fill our discussions and is at the centre of our concerns. However, life begins to smile on us. Most of the confreres - all in our communities of Benicassim and Madrid - have already received the two doses of the vaccine. It made us feel less threatened and a little more comfortably relaxed. We strive to be faithful to the directives - or prescriptions - received from our health authorities as precautionary measures.



The health of our confreres concerns us. We are aware of the catchphrases of our age as well as the fatigue and mental sluggishness that follows. The worry becomes a problem when we rely on the confreres to keep company and properly attend to the confreres hospitalised or residing in old people's homes, who are growing in number.

We are now working on two major restructuring projects in our Sector of Spain. On the one hand, Africa Fundación Sur, (now CIDAF again) will be entrusted to the Complutense University of Madrid after a five-year transition period. On the other hand, our Sector is in talks with the Archdiocese of Pamplona for a contract to establish a community of Missionaries of Africa in an area of the diocesan seminary of Pamplona,

reconditioned to become a home for the elderly. The management of all the necessary services would be the responsibility of the diocese, and our community would retain its autonomy for the organisation of its daily life. We hope and pray that the current negotiations will come to a successful conclusion.

Great Britain: We have just completed our first year of LOCKDOWN. The good news is that our over eighties already have their second dose of the vaccination and our over seventies will be having theirs this week. The rest of us need a few more weeks of patience. It is a great weight off our shoulders. We had a few scares in the last two months when some of our workers had to go into isolation after testing positive. Thankfully, they are all well.



Serge Traore finally arrived on the 5th of March to continue his doctorate studies at SOAS. He had started in Burkina. Up to now, it is only a change of room as everything is online. Quarantine was a bonus for his studies.

We should have had a few jubilees, but all were COVID housebound. Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, Ted Wildsmith and Pat Harrity had their Diamond Jubilees of ordination in February. William Crombie completed 25 years of Oath on the 8th of April.

We can meet in gardens. The Sector Delegate had his first visit, since he arrived in August, to the MSOLA on a sunny day last week – nice tea and hot cross buns.

Hopefully, next Easter we will not be saying, ‘We have just completed our second year of LOCKDOWN.’

From Germany comes this report from Ernst Sievers: During the past 10 years, I used to be much on the ‘road’ all over Germany as a speaker at various events, mostly in Charismatic Renewal. However, since March 2020, I am practically always at home in Cologne and the Lord has miraculously opened a door to a new kind of ministry for me: Spiritual Accompaniment or to use a better expression: He has called me to be a ‘Companion on the road’ - like Jesus on the road to Emmaus - for roughly 20 people: priests, men and women, young and elderly. I have no website on the Internet, and I have no propaganda with leaflets. My address was simply passed around by word of mouth and I was delighted to welcome a growing number of people looking for help to find their way forward in these difficult times. Most of this ministry takes place on a monthly basis; for some few, also weekly and for some more, irregularly. Most of these people call me on the phone on previously arranged dates. The younger generation prefers to meet me via ZOOM. Since this January, I was also provided with a spacious room in the former wing of the Sisters who used to serve us, with its own entrance and toilet. In this way, people who are living near or in the city of Cologne are allowed to see me face-to-face.

What a blessing of God that I am no longer obliged to travel but can stay at home while those who seek help to find God's will for their lives find me here. How wonderful when through the grace of God reconciliation, peace and inner healing can flow into wounded hearts. My principal part in all of this is intensive listening and asking a few questions for clarification. This - with the grace of God - opens the inner door for a process of healing and renewal. Looking back over the past 12 months, I can only give thanks to God for the fruitfulness of His working in the hearts of most of those I have been able to accompany.

The Netherlands: The pandemic is always the main issue in our conversations and our prayers, even if the government of the country is also a topic of conversation, since there have been elections for the national parliament: 17 political parties share the 150 seats in parliament. This likely indicates the formation of a coalition government.



The vaccination of confreres continues. If everything goes as planned, all the confreres will have had the second vaccination by the end of May 2021. We all await with hope the relaxation of the containment measures, but we are also convinced that it must be done very gradually.

On 7 March 2021, our confrere Marcel Mangnus, the only Dutch confrere still present in Tanzania, died in Dar-es-Salaam, victim of the corona pandemic. Thanks to YouTube, the family and confreres were able to follow the funeral ceremony live in the cathedral of Dar-es-Salaam. A mass of commemoration and thanksgiving for Marcel's missionary life was celebrated with the family in the parish church of Heythuysen.

On 25 March, our confrere Jan Mol moved to another address. He left our community of Heythuysen to live in a care home in Breda, a town where a large part of his family lives.



Italy: As of 7 April 2021, the Italian Sector has 26 confreres. The community of Castelfranco Veneto is made up of five Italian confreres, on average 86 years of age, and a young African confrere at the end of his studies in Venice. Father Alberto Rovelli, 79, who is returning from the Democratic Republic of Congo, is expected to arrive next July.

Fifteen confreres, with an average age of 78.5 years, form the community of Treviglio. Among them, Fr. Claudio Zuccala should be leaving soonest for Mozambique, while Fr. Nicholas Aayire will leave for the community of Toulouse, when the borders reopen. We note the arrival of Fr. Italo Iotti as the new Treasurer of the Sector and Father Vittorio Bonfanti for the care of migrants present in the region. Father Giuseppe Locati continues his action to raise awareness and strife in the area of women trafficking. Four Italian confreres are in Africa and a fifth is Local Bursar at the Generalate.

The closure of almost all pastoral and missionary promotion activities due to the covid-19 pandemic is at the origin of an increasingly precarious financial situation. However, good news, up to now, no one among us has been infected with Covid in the Sector.



Poland: We welcomed Magloire Bamali in our midst. He is already making systematic progress in Polish. Our community life in Lublin continues normally as much as it is possible in these times of pandemic. We had a series of meetings (preparation for the Chapter, Vocation Promotion, current matters, etc.,) and community monthly recollections, led by outside preachers. Mariusz has been very active in Missionary Promotion in the time after Christmas. We welcomed some Christian groups for their weekend recollections in our house. Emmanuel preached the Lenten parish retreat in Central

Poland. Covid-19 finally reached us, one of us tested positive. He is recovering well. Although others are negative, we were forced to call off the recollection for the imminent weekend of Palm Sunday. We halted visits in our local parishes and to the community of Sisters where we offer our priestly services. Our isolation ended before the Easter break. The community resumed its normal pastoral rhythm.

The Provincial Team

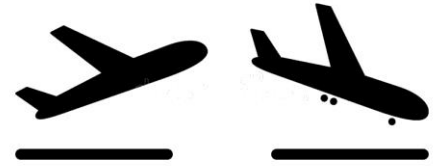
Despite the restrictions due to Coronavirus, we remain in contact with the Sectors and some communities. The 'Happy Easter' messages made it possible to receive a lot of beautiful and less beautiful news from most of the communities. Thanks to WhatsApp, Skype, Google, Zoom, we are kept in fraternal contact, even sometimes visually. However, we dream of the day when we can shake hands again... even more fraternally!

We accompanied the sick confreres with our prayers and were saddened by the departure for the other shore of several confreres, especially Jean-Marie Vasseur, our former Superior General.

Our health is fine. Philippe Docq is preparing to return to Rome... normally at the beginning of May. For the moment, he is a regular help for the computer-illiterate confreres in Brussels. For sure, the Roman confreres of the same type are eagerly awaiting his arrival!

Departures and Arrivals

We say **goodbye and thank you** to our three stagiaires, Christian Fredrick Ngoitanile (Marseille), Rahul Lakra (Toulouse) and Jean Damascène Bimenyimana. Thank you for your contribution to community life and to the pastoral life where you were integrated, and all this in the midst of a pandemic with its many limitations. Keep up the good work to wherever you will be called.



Goodbye for now – (because we intend to see him again) - to Michel Ouedraogo (Marseille) who is going to super-educate himself in Nairobi. Thank you, Michel, for everything you have brought to your community, to the prisoners you have accompanied and to the Sector of France.

Let us point up a few arrivals: Patrice Sawadogo has finally arrived in Leuven where he starts a sprint to make up for a month of missed lessons. Serge Traore arrived in London where he continues his courses online. Welcome also to our two new stagiaires, Wemeoda Ernest Tenta and Sylvester Yobele. To all four of you, welcome to Europe!

We also bid 'welcome' to the confreres who have returned or will soon return 'conclusively' to their country of origin. We note in particular Francis Leduc, who arrived in France after some 50 years of missionary service in Lebanon. A new missionary adventure begins for you!

