



June 2021

Dear Confrères,

The 29th General Chapter of our Society will take place at the Generalate from the 13th May till the 19th June 2022. Our Province may send 5 delegates to it. We are invited to elect them before the 31st July. To do this, it is crucial to broaden our horizons and to think 'Province' rather than 'Sector'. Let us be open-minded and send confreres to Rome who will project a dynamic image of the Province, able to assist the Society to advance, thanks to their contribution.

Issues have been put forward for our consideration. The Sectors chose various options depending on the possibilities related to the pandemic. Some Sectors have encouraged meetings between communities. Others invite confreres to send their thoughts directly to the Sector secretariat.



The Pre-Capitular Assembly will be held at Brussels from the 13th to the 16th September. For this Assembly, you are also invited to choose your Delegates. The Assembly will welcome your votes and will be supported by your thoughts.

As our Provincial, Father Gérard Chabanon, wrote to us, *'These administrative details should not distract us from giving our full attention to the essential: Prayer for the Chapter and the participation of all the confreres in preparation for the 2022 Chapter. The Chapter will prepare the way for the next six years. Let us pray to the Holy Spirit that our elected representatives can give a dynamic impact to our Society.'*

Georges Jacques

News from the Province and Sectors

FROM IRELAND: Like the rest of Europe or indeed the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has dominated life in the Irish Sector. Thanks to stringent changes to the way of life in the community we have managed to keep the virus out of the house. For a community that see

'hospitality' as their 'community project' keeping visitors out of the house went against the grain but did achieve its objective of safeguarding the community. Morning daily Mass for the local community was suspended and staff wore masks at all times. Local and international travel was strongly curtailed. However, due to active initiatives taken by the local Superior with the health department, the community and staff were in the first one percent of the population to be fully vaccinated. Indeed, the only two community outings in the last fifteen months were for the two vaccinations.

The pandemic also stopped confreres coming on home leave. Mandatory Hotel Quarantine for two weeks, for anyone coming from Africa, at your own cost, was a major persuader not to travel to Ireland. So too was the fact that only essential travel was allowed within the country and home leave would not be deemed to be essential travel. The good news is that the country is slowly winning the battle and little by little some sense of normality seems to be returning. An air of optimism prevails.



Community life changed in the sense we were always together, and everyone pulled their weight to maintain a joyful atmosphere. A new community initiative was to have a 'movie' night on Tuesdays that proved to be popular. Missionary appeals that were so much a part of the community outreach came to an end and one wonders when they will resume again. As life slowly resumes normality, we look forward to opening our doors again to the outside world.

Things are changing in Ireland and not just as the house is gradually opening up to visitors.

This is how the Sodexo company has now taken over the maintenance of the house and the preparation of meals every day of the week. Moreover, appetites are keen!

FROM SWITZERLAND: Since the last Sector Council on the 8th January, the community of Fribourg has been characterised by inching forward. The gradual coming out of lockdown and vaccinations have allowed everyone to resume their activities, household services, publications, and ministries. The most significant event was the celebration of Easter with our neighbours, who came in large numbers, bringing good wishes and gifts. Handel's Hallelujah echoed in the chapel.

The community of Veyras is ageing and its general health is not improving. Life is quiet, helped by Corona. There are few outside activities apart from Oskar Geisseler attending to ministry. Three of us provide a regular service to the Trappistines of G ronde who appreciate it.

The Provincial of Europe and his Assistant will visit our communities and isolated confreres from the 22nd to the 24th June at Veyras, then at Fribourg.



Visit of our Archbishop Bernard Aubertin

The 21st Pilgrimage to the Saints of Africa took place on Sunday, 6th June 2021, at the Africanum des Pères Blancs, Fribourg. Due to the pandemic, the event took place with a limited number of people and without a procession.

The atmosphere was festive in the inner courtyard of the Africanum on that Sunday afternoon. Traditional African

costumes were to be seen alongside the usual priestly vestments, added to by the required masks, when the spacing was not enough.

Usually, the pilgrimage takes place at Saint-Maurice (VS), where it brings together hundreds of people from French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland. It gives rise to a colourful procession around the district of Agaun and lasts the whole day. At Fribourg, only forty people gathered for an afternoon. Those taking part stayed on the esplanade of the Africanum.

The theme of this 21st edition was 'Examples of faithfulness and interreligious coexistence', with specific reference to the martyrs of Africa and Algeria.



FROM FRANCE: The monthly Mini-Link and the new publication 'Contact - Voix d'Afrique', which comes out four times a year, give us welcome news of the Sector.

At Ste-Foy-Les-Lyon, June is to be the month of farewell. The keys to the house were indeed handed over to the new owners on the 30th June.

At Friant, since the last meeting with ELIOR, things have vastly improved. The menus are more varied, the meats more tender (they finally understood that we are elderly)! Meals with a theme should normally come twice a month. The last one on the theme of Alsace earned us a good sauerkraut, a good 'gewürtz' (*Gewürztraminer Alsace wine*). As for the work, the project is

progressing well, but we will still need a little patience. 'The plans in the main are complete. All the technical and technological aspects still must be finalised, seeking to add an ecological touch. We would like to submit the building permit during the second half of this year,' said Michel Girard, Head of the Committee for the project.

At Billère and Bry, the doors are gradually unlocking. The pandemic seems to be sounding defeat. At Marseille, Daniel Kabuya and Stephen Beru are preparing to go on leave. Guy Vuillemin is waiting for a replacement after this long period of solitude.

At Toulouse, they are still waiting the arrival of a third confrere for their community. Anand Kujur, a confrere from India, was appointed there, but due to Covid 19, obtaining the visa seems to be very difficult. Patience still seems to be the watchword.

The Sector is delighted with the ordination on 20th May of Jean-Baptiste Uzele, a Congolese confrere, who will soon join the confreres at Marseille, where he had completed his *stage*.



FROM SPAIN: This year there will be holidays. We hope!

As in many other European countries, the situation, especially the state of mind of the confreres, is very different from what we wrote in our last report for EUR-ECHO. The decline of the coronavirus and the coming of summer, a summer without masks and without the restrictions that we experienced last year - all of this means that a smile is not far from our faces. In addition, along with the temperature outside, our expectations are also starting to rise.

Most of us spent most of the summer literally confined to our rooms for the past year. We didn't even dare to talk about holidays. This year it will be different. At least we hope so! We are already starting to refer to holidays. It is a good sign.



However, before that, we would like to complete the two major restructuring projects of the Sector that we have at hand. These are the transfer of *África Fundación Sur* to the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*, and the contract with the Archdiocese of Pamplona to integrate a community of Missionaries of Africa (15 confreres) into the residence for priests, managed by the Archdiocese, in part of the constructions (one of the buildings) of the seminary. Negotiations with the two institutions are well-advanced. If this last project is successful, we will

close down one of our current communities, and we will have to relocate the personnel between the two remaining communities. It will probably be either in Madrid or at the seminary of Pamplona.

There are no planned changes regarding the community and the Migrants Project at Roquetas de Mar. This project has been sluggish for the past year due to the pandemic. We hope it will regain its cruising speed during this year.

We wish you all a very happy holiday time.

FROM GERMANY: On 19th May, the Missionaries of Africa from the German Sector entrusted their Archives to the care of MISSIO. This bequest was necessary since the AFRIKANUM house was closed at the beginning of June.

The Afrikanum was built as a home for students from Africa as part of the 'Afrikanum' programme launched by the White Fathers in the 1950s. When the governments of some Länder stopped granting scholarships, the hostel had to cease its activities. At the beginning of 1970, the Provincial and his team moved there. The house was large enough to accommodate the Provincialate with all the necessary services. It also made it possible to extend to other activities such as Vocations Ministry, Missionary Promotion, welcoming confreres on leave and other visitors from Africa who had come to meet NGOs involved in development.

Nevertheless, the Sector gradually limited its participation in these different activities and the ageing of the confreres highlighted the need for a new direction for the community of Cologne. This is how the Sector, in agreement with the Provincial and the General Council, decided to close the Cologne house.



The 11 confreres, including the Head of the Sector, moved to a retirement and care home in the centre of the city, near the Cathedral. Their new address is Seniorenhaus St. Maria, Schwalbengasse 3-5, D-50667 Köln.

This residence is managed by the *Fondation des Sœurs Celletines*, a 19th century Congregation and spiritually

close to the Beguines (*Lay Religious*) movement. This Foundation manages several hospitals and retirement homes in the Archdiocese of Cologne.

By contrast, the Sector Treasurer's Office has been set up at Afrikamissionare – WEISSE VÄTER, Dülkenstraße 9, D-51143 Köln, to continue its various activities.

The change of location is surely a challenge, not only for the 11 confreres, but for the whole Sector, because the move opens the door to another missionary life.

Hans Vöcking

FROM THE NETHERLANDS: Since April 2021, all confreres living in Heythuysen have made 2 trips to vaccination centres where each of them received 2 vaccinations against the COVID-19 virus. We were vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine. On Thursday, May 27, the last confreres

had their 2nd sting. In the afternoon of the same day, we celebrated this event with "vlaai" (cake known in the Province of Limburg) and coffee, then drinks accompanied by an abundance of various appetizers. **A real party!** It felt a bit like a liberation, even though we know that COVID-19 is still waiting for us..... But we feel better protected. The confreres residing elsewhere also had the 2 vaccinations.



Since 5th June, our restaurant and terrace are again open for visitors from outside, but we must keep to the 1.5 metres distance. Confreres from everywhere are welcome again to our restaurant: **Karibu!**

The same air of liberation is also felt by the arrival of confreres for their home leave or their medical check-up. It is still uncertain, but by the time you read these few lines, 3 confreres will be on leave in the Netherlands, others are expected for later in the year. We live all this with hope and confidence. It might not be the time, but as the exception confirms the rule, I feel I must say and write: **Happy New Year to all of you!!**

FROM POLAND: Just passing through...

In August 2020 I arrived in Poland for my 2 month leave, but when I wanted to return to Algiers in October 2020, it was no longer possible. Algeria had closed due to the pandemic. In the meantime, I was offered a new mission in Jerusalem. So I am leaving Algeria, after 12 years in the Sahara, to go to the Holy Land soon.

This time in Poland was very rich for me, living a moment in my country, in my own culture and with the confreres that normally I could only see during the holidays. These 11 months spent in this corner of Europe allowed me to observe the changes that have taken place in Europe and

especially here in Poland. After years spent in the Sahara in a Muslim country, I found myself in the Polish Church, with its very particular way of life, but still very lively and active. Giving thanks to God, I was able to celebrate my 25 years of priesthood and I met many old friends.



Even though the number of vocations is decreasing in Poland, as it is all over the world, the Lublin community is not resigned. It continues to encourage the local population to be open to mission and to meet the African world wherever possible. Many people have links with our community, visit us and pray with us. Thanks to the confreres for this work!

On 5 June we celebrated the feast of the Uganda Martyrs -

the titulars of our chapel. After a beautiful mass, we had a barbecue in our garden. Among our friends, there were about forty Africans who are studying here in Lublin. On 12 June I celebrated a sending mass for the White Sisters for four young Polish women who will be going as lay missionaries-volunteers to several African countries this summer. For all the young people present at the celebration, it was a good witness of commitment to contemporary mission. Our world still needs witnesses of Christ's love.

Before leaving for my new mission, I wish each of us the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, so necessary today to prepare the Chapter of 2022. May He enlighten us in our search and direction for the future as White Fathers of the 21st century!

Shalom (שלום)! Krzysztof Stolarski

AND FROM THE PROVINCIAL TEAM: Travel has resumed. What a pleasure!

Georges went to Poland to take account of the work of the confreres there. Gérard, after a splendid week's retreat, made a stop in Cologne to admire the new home of the confreres. Finally, Gérard and Georges spent an impressive week in the Swiss mountains. As for Didier, he held the fort after a brief stay with his family following the death of his brother.



The holidays are also looming on the horizon...

Each in turn, we will take a little time out for spiritual and family renewal, as well as for friends.

However, the end of August will see us all gathered for the preparation of the Pre-Capitular and the next Provincial Council.

GOOD NEWS... Our stagiaires **Jean Damascène Bimenyimana** (Roquetas) and **Fredrick Christian Ngoitanile** (Marseille) were accepted to continue their Initial Formation. Damascene is appointed to Nairobi and Fredrick to Jerusalem. We wish a good trip to both of you. We hope to see you again in a few years. As for **Rahul Lakra** (Toulouse), he left for India on 16th June. There, he will look out the best way to serve Christ and the people of God. Have a good trip, Rahul!

Rafal Chlastawa, our only European candidate, is completing his spiritual year in Arusha and has been called to pronounce his declaration of intent and to receive the ministry of reader. He is appointed to Burkina Faso for his stage.

FOR THE NEXT EUR-ECHO

On 8th June, a webinar was organised at the level of the Society (33 participants from Europe, Africa and even Montreal), which helped us to better appreciate the project of the *Laudato Si* platform. You can find the webinar thanks to the following link: <https://youtu.be/G8XAhBN6oSU>.

At the end of the Webinar, Andreas Göpfert presented us with a table that you must have received. This table can guide our thinking about what we have already accomplished or what we plan to accomplish in relation to the 7 goals of *Laudato Si*.

In future Eur-Echo numbers, we would like to publish some testimonies of communities engaged in one way or another in the achievement of these goals. Do not send us the complete tables, but rather a short testimony of the very tangible choices that your community has chosen to integrate into its community project for the year 2021-2022. We are looking forward to the results of your brainstorming! Thank you!

PRAYER FOR OUR PRECAPITULAR ASSEMBLY

Responding to Cardinal Lavignerie's call, European Missionaries have left their countries for 153 years, to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel in Africa. Today, they are few.

We know, Lord, that you are present to everything we experience, in happiness or in misfortune. We pray that your Holy Spirit will take possession of our hearts and broaden our vision of mission today, in Africa and in Europe.

May this time of preparation for the Chapter be a time of reflection, discernment and sharing among us! Let our discussions be marked with frankness, realism, and faith!

Our Lady of Africa, pray for us

