

*My God, ... deign to grant us your peace...
unite us more closely with each other...
so that we may be one,
as you and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one.
Amen!*

HAPPY FEAST OF SAINT MICHAEL GARICOÏTS



Nef

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May

Nouvelles En Famille



Societas Sacratissimi
Cordis Jesu

Betharran



The peace in our hearts

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FOR INTERNAL USE

nurses were preparing the hospital, whitewashing doors and windows, putting up partitions, and polishing the floors. Military trucks came and went, carrying bedding from the Bernadotte barracks in Pau. Within a few weeks, the hospital was ready to operate.

But the turn of events delayed its use. At the beginning of winter, majors, pharmacists, officers, and nurses departed one after another. Three men remained: a sergeant and two soldiers to guard and maintain the wards and equipment. For a few months, three missionaries were even able to occupy rooms on the third floor. The hospital remained dormant, silent. Only the occasional ringing of the telephone, the sergeant's calls, and the nurses' songs gave a semblance of life to the immense building. With May and the blitzkrieg against France, doctors and nurses reoccupied the building and received the first wounded, most of whom were retreating soldiers from hospitals near the front. For nearly two months, our courtyards and the area around the sanctuary were filled with soldiers: cripples leaning on canes, men with facial injuries bearing white bandages, arms in slings, but above all, convalescents and anemics who had come here to recover. The hospital housed up to 150 patients.

Faced with this influx of soldiers, a

military mass was held every Sunday at 9:30, where Father Bordachar spoke. By the beginning of August, the successive healing of the wounded and the demobilization left only a few sick men at Bétharram, who were soon taken to Lourdes. The house was returned to us. The auxiliary hospital had not quite lasted a year.

We were pleased to see that officers and soldiers alike immediately took to Bétharram, whose location captivated them. The chief physician, Dr. Germain, could not contain his emotion as he left us. From the very beginning, he was a friend of the house, taking as much interest in our sick as in his wounded, visiting them often and offering them advice. He was often seen sitting near Father Lassalle. They didn't always talk about medicine, but more often about regional folklore, of which he is a fervent enthusiast. The old traditions of our country, Basque festivals and customs in particular, have no more eloquent admirer. Dr. Germain promised to return. We will see him again as a benefactor sees his benefactor.

Bétharram seems to have completed his military service. But the guests he received during the war will long live in his memory. ■

Father Jean OYHENART, “disappeared” (May 1940)

What will have become of him, Father Buzy’s inseparable companion, also a recently ordained priest, also assigned to China?

On May 12, Pentecost Sunday, he wrote a postcard from Belgium to Father Larramendy: “I am writing to you still somewhat shaken by today’s bombing... Like all our brothers, I am in danger... if I have an accident, you will know how much I loved Bétharram...”

Auxiliary Hospital (August 1940)

In these last days of August, an unusual activity fills our courtyards and corridors. Here, soldiers carry beds or mattresses; further on, children pass by laden with books; everywhere, Fathers come and go, covered in dust.

The word is on everyone’s lips: “We’re moving out”... Understand this: missionaries and apostolic priests are returning home. The auxiliary hospital has just closed its doors.

As you may recall, the large house was requisitioned at the beginning of hostilities to be converted into a military hospital.

We tried to keep a few sunny rooms for our elderly Fathers and our sick. It was all in vain. We had to completely empty the building, moving the kitchen and refectory to the basement, which housed the museum. For a month and a half, there was a constant coming and going of volunteer teams, in which Fathers Raoul Méda and Antoine Pérez, the newly ordained priests, played the most active role.

While, as best we could, we were settling into the old monastery,



Fr. Jean Oyhénart scj, who was listed as “missing,” finally came back from the front, having lost an arm.

May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts

“Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.” (Eph. 4:3)

Dear Betharramites:

The unceasing search for Peace, unity, and solidarity represents one of the most genuine aspirations of a Betharramite today. It is part of the core of our charism, which has the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Prince of Peace, as its model.

Our founder was a tireless apostle of Peace in our hearts. He taught us to build it by being faithful to the Will of God. He asked us to pray daily for this Peace. In solidarity with his time, he dedicated himself to the Church to combat the spirit of disunity and insubordination that had developed in post-revolutionary France. He wanted us to be men of Peace, humble and obedient out of love.

The second reading from the Mass of Saint Michael Garicoits, which we read each year, evokes his fervent desire:

“...Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful...” (Col 3:14-15).

Working to build peace in the community—that is the task. For peace to reign means never giving up on living in communion with all our brothers and sisters, even with “this fellow” and “that fellow...” This constant attitude that Saint



Michael desired is the fruit of a sincere, humble, reconciled, and grateful heart, in which the Heart of Jesus is given free rein to reign above all generational, cultural, and other differences.

The Peace of Christ, witnessed in community, becomes *prophetic* in a world divided by systemic discord. In today's culture we are taught to put the self first, our "sacred autonomy," our individuality, our personal project. But this doctrine does not prepare the way for encounter; it is not effective in building peace, because in reality it places us at the centre of the stage: sometimes to play the "prince" and at other times to claim "victim status." By acting this way, we are not living "stripped of everything," "surrendering to the Father's will" (SMG).

Today, in our communities, a rich diversity is growing. A multi-coloured presence invites us to walk with our brothers and sisters, with their limitations and personal gifts, leaving a common mark, a shared identity forged with diverse cultural traits.

Living as a Betharramite in the 21st century means accepting oneself as one is, and accepting the differences one has with others without renouncing living in communion. It is above all about *renouncing returning evil for evil or paying back insult for insult* (1 Peter 3:9), even if my brother has offended me or wounded my dignity. How could we judge and condemn one another when we have been called to clothe ourselves in the love of Christ who gave his blood for us? How could we allow ourselves to be dragged down by resentment when Saint Michael has called us to consecrate ourselves through love: always joyful, constant, and submissive?

The call to be artisans of peace and unity is not a catchy or optional saying. It is *an essential task* that cannot be ignored by any Betharramite, nor abandoned to subjectivity, nor watered down by "reasonable excuses."

This essential call appears clearly in our constitutions:

While it may seem surprising that the word "**peace**" appears explicitly only once in the context of fraternal life in community, its place is central; it is in the opening prayer of Chapter V (and was composed by Saint Michael Garicoits himself):

From the Second World War Front

It would seem that war, the act of killing one another, is an integral part of human nature, as if we couldn't do without it. We see this clearly in our own times. Bétharram, too, has had to pay its price for this sad facet of human nature. Several members of Bétharram enlisted to defend their homeland or their beliefs, either by personal choice or because they were compelled to do so by the laws in force, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. And since war is no laughing matter, some sacrificed their own lives...

During the Second World War, the NEF closely followed these religious figures, often publishing excerpts from their letters, tracing their fates and often their captivity, or recounting the final moments of their lives in service to God. For that was their primary objective, as Father Romain Saubatte SCJ wrote in 1915, shortly before his death at the front: "I am leaving as a priest, not as a killer of men..." ■ Roberto Cornara

Below, the editorial team offers some excerpts from the NEF from this period:

From a letter by Father Joseph Bur, dated May 13, 1940:

(...) Planes night and day; distant or close-range bombings that make the windows rattle. So far, the danger has remained fairly far from us. Yesterday morning, while leaving to return behind the Meuse River, our convoy was overflowed at 100 meters by 11 bombers that respected the Red Cross. But one of our ambulances, which had

gone up near the lines, took two 27mm shells fired at point-blank range from behind a house. The three occupants were more or less seriously injured.

Another lamentable scene: the ceaseless and tragic exodus of these people who leave on foot, in horse-drawn carts, with a mattress and a few belongings. On the Namur-Cambrai road, it is a continuous and dense procession.

Region of Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified



INDIA |

Br. Jijoe Antony Kurusu scj just pronounced his first vows in the Congregation back on May 8th in Bangalore.

Fr. Jijoe was born on August 8, 1997 in India, in Tamil Nadu. He did his novitiate at the interregional St. Joseph Novitiate in Bethlehem.

For his second canonical year, he headed over to the Hojai community where he served at Don Bosco school.

*“My God, do not look upon my sins, but upon the Congregation that Your Sacred Heart conceived and formed. Deign to grant it Your **Peace**, that one **peace** which, according to Your Will, can **pacify** it and closely unite all who compose it, with one another, with their superiors, and with Your Divine Heart, so that **they may be one** as You are one with Your Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen, Fiat. Fiat” (DS 237).*

This prayer is inspired by the Gospel: *“That they may be completely one”* (Jn 17:23). **Peace**, more than a repeated concept, is a reality that springs from the communion lived in our communities, in our works, in the Church. **It is the fruit of a life reconciled in Christ, of healed relationships, of a fraternity built from within. Betharramite peace is alive and vibrant.**

In the Constitutions, the emphasis on **unity** is very striking. The Rule of Life mentions it on numerous occasions, underscoring that it is not an addition, but *part of the very nature of our charism*. The Eucharist (nos. 8 and 82) appears *as the source and summit of this unity*: in it, the brothers recognise one another as one body in Christ. It is no coincidence that Jesus’ prayer for unity is also recalled (no. 70), thus placing community life at the very heart of the Lord’s desire.

This unity is neither spontaneous nor automatic; it requires the care, mediation, and responsibility of those who hold positions of authority—from the local superior (n. 67) to the Superior General (n. 197). Their leadership is understood as a guarantor and promoter of communion.

The synodal bodies of the Congregation, such as the General Chapter (n. 180) or the organization into Regions with respect for cultural differences (n. 221), are also presented as *signs and tools at the service of unity and charity*.

However, *Betharramite unity is not uniformity*. The Rule recognizes and values diversity, especially in the area of formation (n. 137), where the emphasis is on the experience of God rather than on forming “standardised Betharramites.” Furthermore, it seeks a harmonious synthesis between cultures, knowing that the transcendent values of the Gospel are transcultural and transsituational, and that they must be embodied and inculturated through personal experience.

THAILAND-VIETNAM |

Br. Luke Piyapol Rommaikajee scj made his first profession in the Congregation last May 9th in Chiang Mai.

Fr. Piyapol was born in the village of Maela (Mae Sariang District, Mae Hong Son Province, Chiang Mai).

He also did his novitiate in Bethlehem, where he stayed for his second canonical year. Supporting our community in Holy Land, he also worked at the Children’s Homes in Bethlehem. He picked up French and studied the correspondence of St. Michael Garicoïts.



For its part, **solidarity**—though less frequently mentioned in the Rule of Life—is translated into concrete choices. For example, *economic solidarity among vicariates* (Est. 20) expresses a real fraternity that shares resources; just as *closeness to the poorest* (n. 52) and *commitment to greater social justice in the world* (n. 53) place our mission at the heart of human suffering, in the “place of all victims” (SMG), where Jesus Christ stood, humble and obedient.

Thus, **solidarity** is not a value that runs parallel to **unity**, but rather *its natural consequence*. A truly united community cannot close in on itself, but opens itself, gives of itself, and commits itself to the suffering brother or sister.

In a world fragmented and at war, **may the Peace of Christ reign in our hearts**, in all the religious and laity of Betharram. Even beyond all the hardships we have uncovered and the obstacles that surround us, let us embrace this challenge of 2026 with courage. Because, ultimately, *only a community that lives united and in solidarity can become a true artisan of peace*.

I wish you a happy feast of Saint Michael Garicoits (May 14) and a joyful remembrance of Venerable Father Auguste Etchecopar (May 30).

May God bless you,

Fr. Gustavo Agín, SCJ,
Superior General

SOME POINTS to share in COMMUNITY:

1. Have there been any recent situations of conflict or disagreement within the community? How have we addressed, accepted, or resolved them? Have we each done our part to ensure that “peace reigns in our hearts”?
2. The text emphasizes that *unity is communion in diversity*: how do we experience this diversity (cultural, generational, personal), and what steps can we take to strengthen a more authentically evangelical unity?
3. We agree that *solidarity is the fruit of true communion*. How is our commitment to the poorest and most marginalised expressed in our community today, and where could we begin to be more faithful to this call?

Decisions of the Superior General and his Council

Meeting of the General Council on April 27 & 28, 2026

- **Region of St Mary of Jesus Crucified**
[Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam]
- Admission to **final profession of Br. John Baptist N’GUYEN VAN Thang**.
- **Presentation to the priestly ordination of the deacons Anselm Prapas CHIWAKITMANKONG and Peter DO VAN Hung**.
- Also, the Superior General with the consent of his Council meeting on April 28th granted, under article 198 of the RdV, a **dispensation from article no. 227, authorizing the Regional Superior to not holding the Intermediate Regional Chapter and replace it with an alternative plan that will be carried out in the various Vicariate Assemblies**.



Message for the LIX World Day of Peace | January 1st, 2026

will be done!”

Now Fr Mario, standing before the throne of God, may say in turn: “Here I am, Lord. I sought to imitate your Son by washing my brothers’ feet as he did, caring for the people entrusted to me. Through the burning coal of suffering, you purified my lips and my heart. And now I stand before you, illumined by the light of your

Face, welcomed into the embrace of your tenderness and mercy.”

For us remains the memory and the precious witness of a lifelong friend who is no longer with us, but who now rests in God, intercedes for us, and continues to walk with us. ■

In memoriam

Italy | On April 27, *Irene Belloni* returned to the Father’s house. She was the niece of Fr. Francesco Radaelli, scj, former Superior General, who now resides in the “San Michele” community at Albavilla.

Irene was a member of a group of lay

Betharramites and took part in many gatherings and meetings, including several at the European level. After a long illness, she passed away at the age of 60.

We remain united in prayer with our brother Fr Francesco and with all his family. ■

The Good Shepherd, who gives his life for the flock and has other sheep not of this fold (cf. Jn 10:11,16), is Christ, our peace, who has conquered death and broken down the walls of division that separate humanity (cf. Eph 2:14). His presence, his gift and his victory continue to shine through the perseverance of many witnesses through whom God’s work carries on in the world, becoming even more visible and radiant in the darkness of our times.

The contrast between darkness and light is not only a biblical image describing the labor pains of a new world being born; it is also an experience that unsettles us and affects us amid the trials we face in our historical circumstances. In order to overcome the darkness, it is necessary to see the light and believe in it. This is a call that Jesus’ disciples are invited to live in a unique and privileged way; yet it also finds its way into every human heart. Peace exists; it wants to dwell within us. It has the gentle power to enlighten and expand our understanding; it resists and overcomes violence. Peace is a breath of the eternal: while to evil we cry out “Enough,” to peace we whisper “Forever.” Into this horizon the Risen One has led us. [...].

Sadly, it is also possible to forget the light. When this happens, we lose our sense of realism and surrender to a partial and distorted view of the world, disfigured by darkness and fear. Many today call “realistic” those narratives devoid of hope, blind to the beauty of others and forgetful of God’s grace, which is always at work in human hearts, even though wounded by sin. Saint Augustine urged Christians to forge an unbreakable bond with peace, so that by cherishing it deeply in their hearts, they would be able to radiate its luminous warmth around them. Addressing his community, he wrote: “If you wish to draw others to peace, first have it yourselves; be steadfast in peace yourselves. To inflame others, you must have the flame burning within.” (Serm. 357, 3).

The Peace in our hearts

Shalom-Eirene – Peace

Fr. Pietro Felet scj,
Community of Sissa Trecasali

Never before, at every level be it political, social or religious, has there been so much talk about peace, so much prayer for peace, and so much discussion about peace. Pope Leo XIV has intensified appeals for peace, culminating in the vigil of 11 April 2026, recalling the legacy of Pacem in Terris. His message for peace is based on the idea of a peace that is “unarmed and disarming.” Peace is not founded on fear, threat, or weapons, but on mutual trust and dialogue. It is not a utopia, but a concrete choice that requires the willingness to disarm hearts first, and then the determination to stop wars through concrete gestures of reconciliation. Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue is also the path toward a just and stable peace. Hope must not be defeated by a “false realism” that leads to resignation in the face of many conflicts.

As of 2026, there are about 56 active armed conflicts in the world. These centers of violence involve more than 92 countries, causing tens of thousands of deaths and over 100 million displaced people, making the international situation extremely unstable, often described as a “third world war fought in pieces.”

Will we ever succeed in correcting our aim and laying a solid foundation for peace? **The Bible can help us move beyond the idea that peace is only the absence of war and recognize it as something much deeper and more vital:** intentions, attitudes, and choices for living together. The Bible speaks of peace in many ways. Let us discover some of them and allow space for personal reflection and concrete choices for peace as a way of life.

[...to be continued in the supplement]



cumstances may be. This is the beautiful witness Fr Mario leaves behind, a witness that invites each of us to reflect and challenges us to live with the same spirit of service.

Fr. Mario “put on the work apron” whenever he was called to serve, first as provincial bursar in Albiate and, in recent years, as administrator in Albavilla, alongside the community of elderly fathers. There he further refined his remarkable gift for caring for both people and the house itself, never hesitating to take on even the humblest manual tasks whenever they were needed.

Brothers, as the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. (Cf. Col. 3, 12-17)

I think Fr Mario gradually clothed himself in something deeper, continually putting on garments that were newer and more beautiful than his own limitations and struggles.

Perhaps you too have noticed that, as the years pass, two paths open before us: either we close in on ourselves and grow a little bitter, or, by deepening our spirit of service, we learn to become gentler,

more understanding, more merciful.

Fr Mario had a naturally reserved and somewhat withdrawn character, perhaps because of his shyness. At times he could be overly direct, even a bit gruff. Yet those who lived closely beside him came to recognize the inner transformation he pursued in the light of the Gospel. Beneath an exterior that at first seemed severe, there emerged a remarkable tenderness and a discreet solicitude one could scarcely have imagined [...]

Over these past years, Fr Mario served as the liturgical guide of our community. Even though age had made his voice somewhat unsteady, he never failed to lead us in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs in thanksgiving to the Lord. It was a precious ministry, deeply appreciated both by us and by the religious communities where he served before illness gradually forced him to step back.

His ministry was always carried out with discretion, expressed more through the witness of his life than through words, and through concrete gestures of closeness toward all those entrusted to his care. [...]

In the first reading, we heard the passage from Isaiah so dear to our Founder, Saint Michael Garicoïts, who drew from it the motto that shaped his entire life: “Here I am; send me. Here I am; let your

† Fr. Mario COLOMBO scj

Cornate d'Adda, 7 October 1947 • Como, 26 April 2026 (Italy)

From the homily by Fr Piero Trameri scj during the funeral of Fr. Mario in Cornate d'Adda.

Born in Cornate d'Adda, the place he left nearly seventy years ago, Fr Mario would return only once a year, for the village festival. He remained deeply attached to what he fondly called "my little hometown." Many of you may barely remember him... yet I would like his time among us to be remembered and cherished as a precious gift, one for which we give thanks to the Lord.

On these occasions, I always like to recall that the Lord entrusts each of us with a particular mission, every single person, not only priests or religious. And that mission is not simply something to accomplish, nor only a witness to bear, but above all a way of being: a unique style of life that becomes a light for all those who encounter us living out a particular truth of the Gospel.

Jesus [...] having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. [...] He got up from table, took a towel and washed the disciples' feet, the gesture that slaves used to make. Then he said: "I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you." (Cf. Jn 13, 1-15)



That's the mission Jesus entrusted to each of us, and Fr Mario understood it deeply, living it faithfully throughout his entire life. Never seeking attention or recognition, he spoke through simple gestures and quiet dedication, often working discreetly behind the scenes. For many years at the *Sacro Cuore* school in Colico, he served as administrator with tireless care and generosity. He ensured that students always had meaningful ways to spend their free time, organizing sports and ski trips, and he watched over them with a father's attentive care, ensuring that no one was ever left wanting, even at the dinner table.

That is what truly matters: serving the people entrusted to us with genuine care and constant attention, whatever the cir-



The Deepest Desire for Peace in the War – Situation

Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj,
Bethlehem

After having participated in the Council of the Congregation, the fathers returned joyfully to their respective missions on 27th February 2026 and on 28th Morning the US-ISRAEL-IRAN war broke out. We were so glad and we thanked God that our fathers could leave Bethlehem without difficulties; on the other hand, it completely disturbed our life. War was known and experienced by our novices from Ivory Coast and Central Africa whereas it was something new to the novices of India, Thailand and Vietnam. For the people of Holy-Land, it was, of course, not something new too but they were worried

about the changes the war bringing in their daily life.

What was new to all our novices is the missiles. We began to watch the crossing of the missiles and the power packed interceptions with a loud explosions of the missiles; the sound of the sirens that accompanied – all made us to have sleepless nights and disturbance in our daily programs. We witnessed shrapnel from missiles intercepted fell in the vicinities of Bethlehem. Other than that, our free movements & travel were curtailed; closing of the schools and shops emptied the city; lack of movement

of the vehicle due to the escalation, created a scarcity of vegetables, gas and provisions and whatever were available – bought with a high price. Even the Holy places were forced to be closed and we were asked to commemorate indoors even the Holy Week. It was the time of Lent which provoked us to pray more for PEACE increasing our HOPE in going closer to GOD. Along with our Mother Church, our Church of Jerusalem invited and proposed few days to pray faithfully for PEACE. We sincerely appreciate the unity within the Church and highly esteem the religious com-

munities who supported each other during this hard time.

As we were just returning to normal life after the year-long war between Israel-Gaza, we could see the life of the inhabitants of the Holy Land was completely overturned: psychological tensions & pressures, collective anxiety, economic collapse, stress-filled faces of the people & general paralysis of services. This resulted in seeing many persons knocking at our door for charity, seeking support and help. With these experiences, I can boldly say that ALL LONGED FOR PEACE. ■

or happiness. Instead I thought my smile brought nightmare to others. I lingered around with that thought. When I went for holidays I thought about it and went for smile design, at the dentist's. I was sincere because I wanted to bring peace on earth. I did not realise that smile must be from the heart and out of love. Every beautiful smile may not be out of love and from the heart. Only when I came back from my holidays I realise that following St. Michael Garicoits' example were effective. The warm welcome I received from the fathers, brothers and people in the ministry place made me to think about John 14:11.

have the courage to walk on the the foot prints of St. Michael Garicoits in following our Lord Jesus Christ. I also found out, what is wrong with human brain from my experience. "What is wrong with human brain? Nothing is left on the right brain, and nothing is right on the left brain". We do not understand what is good from bad. We go looking for the external beauty, money and authority. Do not forget, we are called to smile and bring peace. Smile, you are bringing peace on earth but let it be a sincere smile and not artificial. Jesus is with us and He is working through us. Let us smile and let Jesus smile in others. ■

It was also an inspiration for me to

Peacemakers, united and supporting one another

Novices of the Saint-Joseph Interregional Novitiate,
Brothers Salomon René, Francis Boris, Stephen Worachok, Hitler,
Kouakou Marcel Xavier, Peter Khoát
Bethlehem

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Matthew 5:9

This verse from the Beatitudes reveals that peace is far more than the absence of conflict: it is an ac-

tive vocation. It is not merely a matter of avoiding war, but of becoming an instrument of reconciliation through the gift of one's whole life, even in contexts most torn apart by violence.

In this year, as we are called to be



of us. Thus my pride which wants to make me believe that the others have to share my point of view, will diminish in communion with the Heart “gentle and humble of Jesus” to admit the value of my brother; and then even our

disagreements make us advance. This 368 letter ends within us, pointing that humility allows everyone to even “progress” seeing the evils he has noticed in the community and on the local and general levels. ■

Smile, you are bringing peace on earth

Fr. Jacob Bisio Puliamally scj,
Nazareth

“Peace begins with smile” this is the most powerful statement from Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I was thinking, what made her to say it and was it true? I do not have a direct answer. I just want to quote from the Gospel of John 14:11 “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves”. The emphasis is on works themselves. Jesus’ works were, the works of mercy, love and peace. The results were miracles of curing, giving happiness to the lives of others, and rising from dead. Everything happened the same, with the life of Saint Mother Teresa. Exactly the same thing happened in the life of St. Michael Garicoits. I imagined the smile on the face, when he gave ride to the people in the cold street. I imagined the happiness and peace on the face of the same people who received help from him. I imagined

the smile on the face of St. Michael Garicoits, when he was gentle and kind with the children. I also, can imagine the future and expectation of life come alive on the face of the children. I imagined the smile on the face of St. Michael Garicoits, when he was making jokes with Bro. Athanase and helped him to come out of his fear and sickness. He was a true father to Bro. Athanase. There, I could imagine the ray of hope on the face of Bro. Athanase. St. Michael Garicoits was really showing, by his life example; how to be an artisan of peace with a smile on His face.

I was inspired by this and tried to imitate St. Michael Garicoits in my mission places. I came to Holy Land, with same attitude. I began to smile at everyone in time of war and uncertainty. I woke up with the shock that my smile did not bring peace



peacemakers, united and supporting one another, our formation experience in Bethlehem gives this theme a particular depth. Indeed, being situated at the heart of a region marked by persistent tensions; the war in Israel, in Gaza, in Lebanon, and with the threats posed by Iran, every day we experience a world in which peace appears both fragile and ardently desired. In such an environment, reflection on peace cannot remain abstract: it becomes an existential and spiritual necessity.

Firstly, our daily life is shaped by anxiety, insecurity, and the suffering of people. Yet, at the very heart of this trial, we discover that God continues to act silently. Far from withdrawing into ourselves, we choose to live fraternity in a concrete way. Consequently, we support one another through prayer, service, and hope, so that our presence may become a discreet yet real sign of peace among those wounded by conflict.

Moreover, in this month dedicated to Saint Michel Garicoits, we draw

from his charism a particular light for our journey. His spirituality is grounded in total availability to the will of God, as expressed in these words: “Here I am, without delay, without reserve, without turning back, out of love for the will of my God!” DS 46. This thought illustrates the inner disposition that characterizes a true peacemaker: complete surrender to God, without conditions. Indeed, peace can only be born in a heart deeply open to God and to others. This attitude thus becomes for us a concrete path of fidelity.

Furthermore, the concrete experience of our presence in Bethlehem vividly illustrates the tension between conflict and hope. In this regard, the reception of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem at Saint Catherine’s Cathedral on 24th December 2025, remains particularly illuminating. Gathered with many young people in a fraternal atmosphere, we were struck by a question revealing the deep fractures of this land: “Do you love Palestine or Israel?” Faced with this alternative, which seemed to impose an exclusive choice, we replied: “We want peace between Palestine and Israel.” The reaction of our interlocutor—a look filled

with hope and these simple words, “I hope the Good Lord will grant it to us one day”—deeply moved us. It expresses, beyond all affiliations, a universal aspiration for peace that touches the deepest desire of the human heart. It teaches us that true peace begins in the heart, through self-mastery, forgiveness, and love of neighbour. Consequently, every small act of charity becomes a victory over violence: welcoming without judging, listening attentively, praying for all without distinction.

In addition to this, Christian peace cannot be understood without reference to the Paschal mystery. Christ did not establish peace by eliminating suffering, but by passing through it and transforming it through love. The Cross becomes for us the victory of love over hatred. In this perspective, being a peacemaker implies accepting a form of self-emptying, loving obedience, and self-gift. As Saint Michel Garicoïts also expressed it: “Our Lord obeyed, quite willingly; he gave his life freely. No one could take it from him against his will; he lays it down and takes it up again when he wills. What willing obedience, unto death—even death on a cross!” DS 200. Thus, in a context of war,



“... manna unfortunately hidden from so many.”

This inner peace of ours and of our community is a necessity expressed by our experience, a construction which demands a permanent help from the Heart of Jesus. The communion between the brothers is necessary to serve the mission, we all know that. But it is a path to follow everyday. The respect of the others, a warm welcome of our brothers to understand the expressed motivations that we have sometimes a tendency to caricature cannot exist without humility searched in Jesus’ Heart. This vigilance given by the prayer allows us in community to verify our own intentions which are

good but which demand patience to make them work. An attention full of delicacy allows to put forward the necessary projections to our sacred life. The risk exists in a community to discourage the initiatives “we tried but it did not work”. This defeatism is bad for the faithfulness of our vocation which takes its source into Jesus’ Heart.

A permanent conversion is to be lived being convinced that our necessary efforts can be sterile without this confidence in the Heart of Jesus whose our Founder is an example. If, in community, we know how to find again this divine origin our human differences will become a riches for all

Prayer For Peace

Fr. Laurent Bacho scj
Community of Saint-Palais

“My God, look not on my sins but upon this Society which your Sacred Heart has conceived and formed. Deign to grant it your peace, that peace according to your will which alone can pacify it and unite more closely all its members with each other, with their superiors and with your divine Heart, so that they may be one as you and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one. Amen! Fiat! Fiat!”

This prayer was composed by Saint Michael Garicoïts. It was published in the circular letter (Nr 368) addressed to all the communities on April 24th 1862, one year before his death.

Our founder faced divisions within the congregation but he relied on Jesus. He is fully conscious to be only an instrument of the Sacred Heart which “has created and formed” the religious family. He knows his own limits or sins. Everyone has not the same ideal in this new society. Some found themselves at ease in the charismatic vision of the Founder and have no difficulties to admit the evangelic demands. Others are satisfied to share the pastoral duties in secondary schools and pop-

ular missions: they feel the community life as a brake of their apostolical impulse. These people can commend themselves to bishop Lacroix who does not share the vows religious demands wished by Father Garicoïts: a sacerdotal society to serve the Bishop and the diocese is enough. Moreover the approval of the priests coming from the Society of the Holy Cross of Oloron is not yet completed except Father Etchecopar’s one.

The positive departure in America has deprived the newborn society of a few very good elements. Besides this group gives also some trouble because of an overflowing generosity claimed by some of them. He expresses his disappointment writing to them in September 1858 (letter 163): *“One believes that one is losing time when things are not going according to the inventions of our own imaginings. One does not know how to understand, appreciate, and embrace the disposition; corde magno et animo volenti et constanti [With a generous heart and a willing spirit]: obscurity, sterility and lack of success is what one sees oneself reduced to, by obedience. This is the*

this means overcoming one’s own fears and ego in order to become available to God’s will, and thereby becoming an instrument of peace. This total self-giving enables one to respond not with violence, but with a charity that brings peace.

Finally, our witness in the Holy Land shows that, even in times of war, unity and solidarity remain possible. It is in this reality that our vocation as peacemakers is fulfilled: to remain united despite everything, in love of God and neighbour, and to pass on this unity to those we encounter. Through this situation, we novices become aware that peace is a daily labour, a path of abandonment to the divine will, a total commitment to the love of neigh-

bour. Our presence in the Holy Land thus becomes an act of faith, hope, and charity, embodying the conviction that peace is always possible—even at the heart of violence—when one consents to give oneself entirely to God and to others, united in charity.

On this feast of Saint Michel Garicoïts, we, the novices of the Holy Land, wish you a holy and joyful celebration. May his, “Here I am,” inspire your life, and through his intercession, may the Lord make you peacemakers. May prayer for peace, in love and solidarity, be our common heritage. ■

The flight into Egypt

Fr. Austin Hughes
Community of Olton

It all happened so suddenly. I’d planned to leave our Bethlehem community where Fr Stervin & novices had been so welcoming, on Saturday morning at 10.00 to catch

London flight, when Fr Stervin told me that a war had started with Iran, and the airport was closed. Council of the Congregation members had reached their respective homes by

now, having left the day before. Did they know something in advance?

The first casualty of war is truth, and in that chaotic weekend, I struggled to find reliable information. Would there be total war in the Middle East? Would our brothers be safe? Would Trump invade Egypt? And then the personal questions: How would I get back home? Would the airport reopen? Were borders open with Jordan or Egypt?

No easy answers, so I went into Jerusalem on the Monday to find solid information. The city was a strange mixture of normality & tension. Markets busy as usual but no trams. Traces of rockets in the sky & loud explosions, but no panic on the ground. Air raid sirens sounding intermittently but nobody paid attention. And all information offices were shut.

But I did see buses leaving for Eilat from the main bus station, so resolved to try that route later in the week. Fr Stervin had ascertained that the Taba border with Egypt was open, so the Elat/Taba crossing to Sinai looked feasible. It helped that I'd taken that route back in 2000 with Pierre Villelongue (a Betharram student), so felt confident. Booking

a flight from Sharm El Sheikh in Sinai to the UK was surprisingly easy (though costly!), so Sinai became the destination.

The EGGED bus website was in Hebrew, which strained my biblical Hebrew from college days, so I arrived at the bus station on Wednesday ticketless. A mix of anxious people sought the Eilat bus, many trying to escape the war through a path to Egypt. But some were simply heading for their homes in kibbutzim around the Dead Sea or the Negev. Luckily there was a place on the bus!

Spectacular scenery all the way! The Wadi Qelt down to Jericho, the Dead Sea coast road to the south, then famous places like Qumran, En Gedi, Masada, sites of Sodom and Gomorrah, and finally the Negev desert. Sight-seeing was never in my plan, but sights were beautiful all the way: wilderness to the west, Jordanian mountains to the east.

At a shared taxi to the Taba crossing saw a large motley collection of people trying to negotiate an exit from Israel and an entry to Egypt. Border formalities took over 2 hours, but it was a huge relief to enter into

transforming this sick society into the Civilization of Love, using military expressions:

- They raise high the standard of the Sacred Heart, so that others may follow them: Here I am, I come to do your will (DS § 9).
- They present themselves and give themselves, before God and before men, recognizing that they are nothing and remaining unnoticed (DS § 9).
- They do not shrink from any internal or external resistance they may feel; on the contrary: they study, ask, employ and demand of themselves, without calculation, to use all the means that the Rule puts in their hands for a task as important and absolutely necessary as the mission (DS § 9).
- They let themselves be driven by the inner law that the Holy Spirit writes on hearts and the outer law of obeying their superiors (DS § 280).
- They are passionate about a flawless life, full of trials, deserving only the cross because of the esteem and love for it (DS § 12).
- They risk their lives to make Jesus Christ known to others so they can

find happiness in him (Manifesto), because they trust his promise of eternal life.

- They are men who are not attached to anything, who are detached from everything, light as a dove and totally free like good soldiers of Christ, ready to go anywhere and take all the victories. (DS § 107).
- They bear on their bodies thousands of marks from blows and wounds received out of love for their Master (DS § 110).
- That's how Saint Paul trained and fought, like a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2, 3; DS § 110).

The mission of the Betharramites, in whatever ministry they find themselves, with their feet on the ground and the fire of love in their hearts, is to collaborate in building the Civilization of Love, not by what they do, but because they make present Jesus Christ, who is the only one who can make all things new, *because God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross.* (Col. 1, 19- 20). ■



and cure ourselves? Seek God in all things, offer everything to God that He might reign in us and over His enemies.” (DS § 60).

This disastrous social situation gnawed at Saint Michael Garicoits from within, frequently leading him to prayer, and in contact with the word of God, it provoked in him this great desire:

“If only it were possible to bring together a group of priests whose programme would be the same programme as that of the Sacred Heart, the eternal priest, the servant of the Heavenly Father ... devotion, absolute obedience, perfect simplicity, unflinching meekness. Such priests would make a true flying squad of specialised soldiers, ready to go at the first sign from their chiefs wherever they were sent, even and above all, to those most difficult ministries that others do not want.” (DS § 6).

As we can see in this last quote, Saint Michael Garicoits, influenced by his observation of reality and by the spiritual terminology of his compatriot Ignatius of Loyola, describes these chosen and daring men tasked with



Sinai. The Egyptian taxi drivers were overjoyed at this unexpected increase trade bonus.

More spectacular scenery in the taxi down to Dahab, a tiny town where I'd stayed with Pierre in 2,000. B & B was cheap, and a 2-night stopover was welcome, a calm and prayerful break before a further shared taxi down to Sharm El-Sheikh. The airport, was thronged with people trying to escape a war, and my flight was delayed several hours.

Two Jewish women joined me for supper in the airport café. One from North London spotted me as

a priest though I wasn't wearing clerical gear. She worked for a Reformed Synagogue in Finchley, and said that she'd met many Catholic priests and that I looked like one of them! I assumed that the younger woman with her was her daughter, but they'd only just met in the security queue. The younger woman was Russian, from Siberia, en route to visit friends in London.

When our London-bound flight eventually left, the captain announced that the crew were 'out of their hours', so we'd stop in Albania for a change of crew. So after a surprise 30 minute stop in Ti-

rana, we landed at Luton, London 4 hours late, tired but relieved to be out of a war zone. Unfortunately the airport parking attendant

was unimpressed by my war story, so I couldn't escape the extra £200 parking charge. But a small price to pay for safety. ■

With saint Michael Garicoïts let us build the Civilization of Love

Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj,
Bethlehem

When we carefully read Saint Michael's writings and manage to connect some reflections with others, we discover in him the realism of the Gospel. He doesn't pass on some ideology to us, but rather an experience of faith that sheds light on the concrete situations he has to live through. He talks about events, institutions, and actual people from society and the Church: the criticism he makes of the deputies of 1852 (DS § 63), the praise for the brave officer from Lestelle, present at the assault on Sebastopol" (DS § 12), how the railroad works, "what precision in the orders, in obedience, in all the movements! 'Come in here, go out there!...' (DS § 197), the whole thing about the Jesuits coming back to Pau (DS § 160), his observations of military practices in the area

around the walls of Bayona when he would go to the curia (DS § 9), Father Cestac's work to turn the sands into a fertile land (DS § 301 and 302), how Fr. Baillancout and Fr. Rossigneux became pillars of the Betharramite community (DS § 302).

Saint Michael Garicoïts, like most priests back in those days, thought the French Revolution had had a negative influence on the Church and society. The Revolution came to break the peace in which one lived, to alter the order that was in society, to create confrontation between social classes. To break the unity, creating divisions. As a good observer, he gives us the following picture of a sick society in which he lives and tells us what should be done to cure it:



"If there are no longer any characters, any homes or any lands on earth the revolution is to blame, having replaced the Kingdom of God by the kingdom of man. Even the most honest people forget that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things and they relate everything to humanity.

This can be seen on a grand scale amongst the peoples of the world, and on a smaller scale amongst individuals, in families and in religious communities. But here and there, above all here, it is a great disaster. Yes here where it is our profession to spread the Kingdom of God in ourselves and around us, it is far more monstrous than in the world, it is the region of darkness. What do we so often see in Christian families,

amongst the clergy and in religious families? Concern for oneself. Myself the end of all things, of the best of things. Everything is based, degraded by sensuality. Everything is false and defiled, philosophy, theology, characters, and the highest ministries. One can only see self, think of self, hence all those worldly preoccupations in which the world loses itself. What a loss of time. What monstrosity, what scandal. Man is put in the place of God, we become materialistic, humanist instead of divine; instead of being for one another the image of Jesus Christ, referring everything to His Father so that looking at one another we will see God and give Him glory. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven'. (Mt 5:16)... Do we want to cure the world