

AA News of the Assumption



PGC : THE FIRST STEPS OF A NEW MANDATE

**MGR GSCHWIND, FIRST ASSUMPTIONIST
BISHOP IN FRANCE**

**A CENTURY OF ASSUMPTIONIST PRESENCE IN
ROMANIA**



Agenda

Plenary General Council

- n° 2 : May 30-June 8, 2024.
- n° 3 : December 2-11.

Ordinary General Council

- n° 6 : February 26-March 1, 2024.
- n° 7 : April 29-May 7.
- n° 8 : June 10-11.
- n° 9 : September 4-20.

Fr Ngoa

- **January 3-11:** Lyon (OGC formation), and Nîmes.
- **February 21-25:** region of Paris.
- **March 4-20:** Brazil (canonical visit).

Fr Benoît

- **January 3-11:** Lyon (OGC formation), and Nîmes.
- **January 17-February 14:** Florence (Italian course).
- **March 4-27:** East Africa.

Fr João

- **January 3-11:** Lyon (OGC formation), and Nîmes.
- **January 26-28:** Paris (JPIC).

Fr Thierry

- **January 3-11:** Lyon (OGC formation), and Nîmes.
- **January 12-17 :** Créteil (Orantes).

Fr Étienne

- **January 3-11:** Lyon (OGC formation), and Nîmes.

On the cover

It hasn't happened in a long time: a gathering of the religious families of the Assumption present in Italy. All gathered in our General House, Sunday, November 19, 2023, to celebrate the "birth day" of our Founder. Approximately 40 of our sisters and brothers united for prayer, sharing, and celebrating Fr. d'Alzon. It was a great day!

"I call you friends" A General meets with his Novices



I was honestly not expecting this message from Bro. Romel a few weeks ago: *"Fr Ngoa wants to meet with his novices! We will meet on Zoom! I hope you can join us!"* I live with one of our General's predecessors, so I have heard stories about the meetings, the traveling.... How much is asked of a brother when he assumes this service for his brothers. So naturally I thought, "How does he has time for us?" Still today, I am nurturing a deep sense of gratitude for the time we spent with our dear Ngoa. All fourteen of us found joy and a renewed sense of hope in being together and being with our teacher. We began by introducing ourselves to one another, for novices from all eight years of Ngoa's ministry were present. We shared the most fruitful experiences and impactful wisdom from our Novitiate. Ngoa also asked each brother how we could pray for him in his religious life. In creating this space for sharing, discovery, and empathy, he showed himself to still be an educator at heart. We reminded one another that an Assumptionist religious is a religious who freely expresses gratitude for everything. We remembered that our novitiate prepared the ground for the rest of our religious life and that we should return to its lessons and blessings as "the true north" of our journey with Christ.

We are all aware of the challenges of being apostles for the Kingdom during this time, and Ngoa allowed us to reflect on these difficulties. He even shared that his mission to "incarnate the charism" for his brothers can be daunting at times. But he reminded us, *"Dear brothers, the Assumption is God's business!"* We need to remember that this charism and mission is a gift from Him, a gift that He ultimately nurtures and makes flourish (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6). God will help us, all of us, with His grace. This grace, for us, is our spiritual cane; as religious we should not think that we can walk the paths of the Gospel by ourselves.

This time of fraternity and remembering was a spiritual cane for us. *"I feel like I just came from a session of spiritual direction,"* one of the brothers commented to me shortly after our reunion. Ngoa even suggested that we come together again regularly; moments of mutual encouragement like this are important for all of us. We are not just laborers in different plots of the same vineyard; we are brothers. We are grateful to our dear Father Ngoa for this lesson, and for the many lessons he will teach us in this new ministry.

Bro. Daniele CAGLIONI
(Worcester, USA)

It is not naive optimism

After almost four months in Rome, I decided to begin fraternal and canonical visits. I have started with the Netherlands, where I had the joy of meeting all our brothers there together. One of them, Fr. Leo van der Klaauw, aged 93, used to write a Christmas letter for his brothers religious and a few friends. At the very beginning of the meeting, he gave me a copy. I was deeply touched by this statement: "And there is a future for the Assumption in the Netherlands. » Those who know the reality of the local Church, and of religious life in particular, can understand why this

statement cannot leave anyone indifferent, especially since it comes from a 93-year-old religious man.

I am writing this editorial on Christmas Day, just upon my arrival at the community of Leuven in Belgium, after having celebrated the Eucharist of the Nativity of Our Lord with our brothers from the community of Woluwe.

Since my meeting with Fr. Leo van der Klaauw until today, one question keeps coming up in my mind: if a 93-year-old religious can still raise his head and look to the future with confidence, why not me? So I celebrated Christmas with that in mind, and I spoke about it in my homilies. Christmas is a time to grow in hope. It is not naive optimism to still hope when even, from morning to evening, the news seems to push us towards discouragement.

Learning to let yourself be surprised by the mercy and grace of God is not a bedtime story. How do we surrender and accept God's will? If faith were simply about being reasonable, that is to say, to adjust the future to our forecasts, however logical they may be, it would not be worth the effort embark on this adventure.

One of the signs that show that we are in a kind of spiritual fatigue is precisely the loss of sense of wonder. This could be due to many things. Often this is due to our very attitude calculator, which nourishes the illusion that we already know what is going to happen: no centimeter is then given to Providence.

In the Notre-Dame de l'Assomption church, run by our brothers from the community of Woluwe, I celebrated the Christmas night mass with more than 400 people. A lively community, which seems determined to continue his march and

that our Assumptionist brothers are always ready to accompany. I saw the same thing in The Hague, Netherlands, where a new mission is beginning.

I am aware of the fragile situation we are going through and the importance of discernment which must be done at all levels. The desire to walk with others is coming true. The General Plenary Council continues to be a place that promotes unity. The PGC was created precisely to "ensure the good of

the entire body of the Congregation" (RC 194).

This is why it is up to it to study the problems of adaptation posed to our Congregation by the evolution of the world and the Church. It must also, in this same mission, accordingly establish the needs of the Congregation in terms of adequate formation,

specialization linked to the mission of the congregation, without forgetting news from foundations. I am particularly satisfied with the work that has been done in this direction.

The PGC that we had in December clearly demonstrated the desire to consolidate the achievements and to continue to find alternatives for collaboration for the life and mission of our Congregation.

Why not imagine this kind of collaboration at the level of the large Assumption family? Think nor is the possibility of such collaboration a naive optimism. Maybe we shouldn't wait for reality to push us into it without having been well prepared. In some countries, this collaboration is underway, but in others it still needs to be motivated.

Our Founder, returning to Jesus' prayer for his disciples, underlines the different levels where we can practice this spirit of unity: "Unity, this is the supreme good that he wishes for them, the last word of

teachings of his Gospel. It is also the one that I propose for your meditations. Our divine Master asked for his disciples unity with his sacred person, unity in the Catholic Church of which they were the first nucleus, the unity between them, the unity in their apostolic works. » (ES p. 701) Yes, that is possible. The start of the year is always a good time for new resolutions, here is one: to be optimist, to think that it is still possible. ■



Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba
Superior General of
the Augustinians of the
Assumption

Calls, nominations, agreements...

Father Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has called:

■ TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

- 1) **Jonnathan CUJIGUALLPA TANQUEÑO**
(Andean Province) (12/12/2023)
- 2) **Denis Geraldo MARTINS RAMALHO**
(Andean Province) (12/12/2023)
- 3) **Daniel MAGIN SAMBONY**
(Andean Province) (12/12/2023)

■ TO DIACONATE ORDINATION

- 4) **Felix KERIGA ATUNGA**
(Andean Province) (30/10/2023)

■ TO PRIESTLY ORDINATION

- 5) **Stéphane TRAN QUYET Quyen**
(Europe) (10/30/2023)
- 6) **Pierre HO SY Can**
(Europe) (10/30/2023)

■ OPENING OF HOUSES

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the agreement of his Plenary General Council, has given his approval for the opening of:

- a **community at Eldoret** (Kenya, Vice-Province of East Africa);
- a **community at Bura** (Kenya, Vice-Province of East Africa).

■ RENEWAL OF A MANDATE

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council, has renewed the mandate of **Fr Vincent LECLERCQ** as Secretary General for Formation for three years, until August 2026.

■ NOMINATIONS OF FORMATORS

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council, has given his approval for the nomination of:

- Fr. **José Miguel DÍAZ AYLLÓN** as **Provincial Formator of North America**;
- Fr. **Marcelo MARCIEL** as **Superior of CIFA of Buenos Aires** (Argentina, Andean Province);
- Fr. **Louis Martin RAKOTOARILALA** as **Superior of CIFA of Nairobi** (Kenya, Vice-Province of East Africa);
- Fr. **Alphonse RANDRIAMIZAKA** as **Superior of the Manirisoa Scholasticate of Fianarantsoa** (Madagascar);
- Fr. **Justin KASEREKA MUNGA** as **Master of Novices of the Pinhal Noviciate** (Brazil).

■ NOMINATIONS AT DUE PINI

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Ordinary General Council, has named:

- Fr. **João GOMES DA SILVA**, **Local Superior of the General House in Rome**, for a 1st triennium, starting September 20, 2023;
- Fr. **Alex CASTRO**, **Local Treasurer of the General House in Rome**, for a 1st triennium, starting November 13, 2023.

■ DEPARTURE FROM THE INSTITUTE

The Holy See, documented on November 3, 2023, has granted an indult of secularization to **Fr. Jorge Eduardo ROJAS GARCÉS** (Andean Province), with a suspension of his vows and a loss of his clerical privileges.

The first steps of a new mandate

The 1st session of the new Plenary General Council began to implement the decisions and orientations of the 34th General Chapter.



It was a bit of a “newbies” meeting. Of course, several members of the General Plenary Council which has just met from November 30 to December 9 at the Generalate in Rome, had already participated in sessions under the previous mandate, but not necessarily at the same place: in fact, five of the seven members of the General Curia elected by the 34th General Chapter are new in these functions, as are two Provincials (North America and Europe). The latter, as well as their colleague from Madagascar named before them, benefited of two days of initiation in their charge before the PGC meeting.

The novelty, however, was even more in the program, even in the style, that in the composition of the group. It was in fact for this Council to begin to put concretely implement the General Chapter held

last June – since this is the primary function of the PGC. In addition to the ritual tour of the Provinces allowing news of each, this was verified in particular on several subjects:

-The evaluation of the 34th General Chapter on the form: there should be more synergy between the preparation of the Provincial Chapters and that of the General Chapter, a presence of lay people who do not limit themselves to listening to reports, a return to the period of the month of May... But we appreciated the modalities of the chapter work: climate of prayer, participation of all, external guests, accompaniment by Father Alberto Toutin, quality of the daily news report...

- Highlights of the **Provincial Chapters of application**: good appropriation of the General Chapter, working and writing method

often taking up the outline of the General Chapter (signs of the Kingdom, emergencies of the Kingdom, further steps for the coming of the Kingdom).

- The establishment of the necessary **animation commissions** and **working groups** by the 34th Chapter at the general level (*read box*).

- The mission of the **General Assistants**, particularly in relations with the territories.

- The validation of the new **Capitular Rules**, after their revision by the Chapter: they will be published and distributed to all religious at the beginning of 2024.

The Council has not neglected themes that occupy it recurrently: **formation** (with a new mission letter for the Secretary General in charge of formation) and the **Postulation**, as well as the **Mobilizing Works**: not, this time, to evaluate

the seven which hold this “label” since 2011, but, according to the wish of the General Chapter, to begin to reconsider the criteria and therefore the list. To be continued!

As usual, **financial questions** represented a large part of the work. As a demonstration, the participation, during the first two days, of the General Treasurer and the Provincial treasurers, forming the Economic Council of Congregations (CEC). On the menu: budget of the Generalate, inter-provincial solidarity for houses of formation, updating for 2024 of the Real Estate Medium-Term Plan and its financing... without forgetting a debate on the use (or not) of employees in our communities... a subject about which we have not yet finished talking.

The PGC did not forget to look up from its files! Guided by Father Vincent Leclercq, it has thus left on a pilgrimage, on Sunday morning, in **the footsteps of Father d’Alzon** through Rome. And it received a member of the recent **Synod assembly**, Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie: the Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, spoke enthusiastically about this historical meeting, emphasizing the importance of bringing around the same table baptized people of all statutes, the need for an inclusive Church making room for all; the need to listen between people of different sensitivities and options; the essential role of style and manner to make Church which were at the heart of this Synod... So many calls, undoubtedly, for our own congregational life, at all levels!

Fr Michel KUBLER (Rome)
with the contribution
of the “red thread”
held by Fr Benoît BIGARD



Animation commissions and working groups

The PGC has launched the establishment of various animation commissions which arise from the Chapter: it defined the list and began to discuss their composition and those responsible (secondly it will be necessary to specify the roadmap for each).

Seven Commissions are thus envisaged: Lay-Religious Alliance / Communication and digital world / Education / JPIC / Mission d’Orient, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue / Pilgrimages / Protection of minors.

There will be added two working groups requested by the Chapter: one on the management of investment funds, the other on the economic issues of the Generalate.



1st row: PP. Pierre CAO BA Vinh, NGOA Ya Tshihemba, Alex CASTRO, Richard ANDRAMAHENINARIVO, Georges HOUSSOU;
 2nd row: PP. Morris GITAU MACHARIA, Fabien LEJEUSNE, Étienne Ratalata RAFANAMBINANTSOA, Yves NZUVA KAGHOMA, Benoît BIGARD;
 3rd row: PP. Luiz Gonzaga DA SILVA, João GOMES DA SILVA, Henri KIZITO VYAMBWERA, Michel KUBLER, Pierre TRAN VAN Khuê, Juan Carlos MARZOLLA; 4th row: PP. Marco SILVA, Thierry KAMBALE KAHONGYA, Rodel CERVANTES, Lucien Telolahy RAZAFIMANANTSOA, Wellington BARBOSA DIAS. - Absent from photo: P. Chi Ai NGUYEN. Absent from the meeting: Fr Vincent KAMBERE KAGHANIRYO.

International sessions

The General Plenary Council outlined a table of international sessions for the six years to come, probably at the rate of two per year: one in Rome, the other decentralized. Among the topics discussed: leadership formation for provincial councils, protection of minors, support for the pre-novitiate stages, preparation for the mission, brothers not moving towards ordained ministries, provincial secretaries, archivists... Without forgetting the meetings of formators: religious in charge of CIFA and large houses (every two years), masters of novices, etc.

A first calendar and corresponding invitations should not take long!

Solidarity campaigns in Assumption

Fr. Alex Castro, General Bursar, gave the PGC an update on the current campaigns:

- In 2022, it brought in 14,826 USD, making it possible to finance a computer laboratory for Assumption High School, in Nairobi, Kenya (see photo).
- In 2023, the project selected by the PGC aims to finance the renovation of the presbytery of Nasandratrony in Madagascar: the campaign is still ongoing.
- For 2024, the PGC has chosen to contribute to the construction of a dormitory for 50 boys at Assumption High School in Nairobi, for the amount of USD 17,821. We call on the generosity of the entire congregation.

Two foundations in East Africa

On the proposal of Father Kizito Vyambwera Henri, Vice-Provincial, the PGC gave its approval to the opening of two new houses in Kenya.

Responding to calls from local Churches, the young Vice-Province continues to demonstrate

initiative and fertility. Here are two examples, while waiting for a third foundation still in development in Namanga, also in Kenya.

Eldoret

The Vice-Province having proposed collaborations with dioceses of Kenya and Uganda, some bishops responded, like that of Eldoret, where we had a plot. In December 2022, he urgently requested to serve the Christ-the-King sector of Waunifor, with a view to making it a parish. Faced with this unmissable opportunity, two religious were sent to launch the mission, which allowed the canonical erection of the parish from August 13, 2023.

The pastoral project includes youth ministry, especially in schools; the animation of Catholic Action movements; catechesis and deepening of faith; the pastoral to the sick and elderly; the concern for justice, peace and reconciliation in the families; and finally ecumenism, especially with the Lutherans.

Waunifor is 12 km from the town of Eldoret, itself 311 km from Nairobi, on the road to

Kampala. The parish has almost 1,500 practicing Christians spread across 9 Sectors and 36 small communities.

The community is currently made up of three religious (two priests and a deacon), who live on donations from the faithful and field produce and live in their own house built with the help of local benefactors.

Bura

In the same way, it is since 2021 that the Vice-Province has been in contact with the bishop of Mombasa, which shows interest in the charism of the Assumption, our apostolate among the young people and the animation of pilgrimages. This is how he entrusted the Congregation with the animation

of the Our Lady of Good Hope shrine in Bura and the chaplaincy of a college in Taita



Celebration at Kamtonga, on the foundation of Bura.

(which has the motto: "Let your Kingdom come through teaching!"). He asks that we also serve the Kamtonga sector with a view to making it a parish.

The PGC having previously encouraged the attempt of this mission, two brothers left in November 2022 ad experimentum. Shortly after, the bishop left management of the college to government, asking us to focus on the Bura sanctuary and the future parish from Kamtonga. This is how we have been in Bura for a year already.

The pastoral project is therefore centered on the animation and structuring of Our Lady of Good Hope shrine, which can be used for the pastoral formation of student brothers from Nairobi. It also includes evangelization and Christian formation of mine workers (gold, precious stones), not to mention a testimony of faith in an environment strongly Muslims (41% of the population).

Bura is located 366 km southeast of Nairobi and 193 km northwest of Mombasa. The local population is approximately 3,000, including 250 active Catholics. ■

“Have the audacity to hope”

Excerpts from the closing speech of the 1st session of the Plenary General Council by Father General



“Ten days wasn’t enough to go a little further or deeper. I would have like to take the time to explore all the themes of the chapter in more depth. Mostly the four which had been the subject of an orientation text, and here I quote: fraternity, holiness, mission and formation. It is not too late. Perhaps for the next PGC we will come back - and if necessary, with the help of a facilitator - to these themes, one theme per PGC, for more seriousness in deepening and appropriation.

Perhaps this is another argument for the thinking we need to continue to have concerning the work of the PGC. This first moment of exchange will allow us to make some decisions so that we may improve the services of this government body and learning whose importance has not yet been doubted.

Father Emmanuel d’Alzon ended his closing speech of the 1868 chapter with these words:

“Let us therefore pursue our goal with joy and confidence and thus deserve, after having worked to increase the kingdom of God on earth, to enjoy it in heaven for eternity.” (E.S. p. 146)

I couldn’t wish you better than this: joy and confidence. Trust in God, because he is the master of the site, but also selfconfidence and confidence in

others.

I ask you to be the first protagonists of this movement (with joy and confidence) in your Provinces. Responses to the call to fraternity, to holiness, to mission, to formation, as with the other calls of the General Chapter, will perhaps be delayed. And it is to this moment that we must courageously continue our march towards the future. Yes it is necessary to have the audacity to hope. (...)

The discussions that took place show us that progress is being made. But we must be open to suggestions and initiatives to continue. We all provided an effort to allow exchanges to take place in a healthy and respectful climate. I sincerely thank you for this. Because the synodal spirit is also this: giving the floor even to those who do not seem to have expertise in the subject.

Experts or not, we have - or better: we should have - the same concerns for our Congregation. And the decisions we make must be oriented towards these same concerns, that is to say: the unity of the body in solidarity at all levels; loyalty to our Founder, with the spirit of the Assumption, with Assumptionist values, and finally a mobilization for life and mission in listening to the Spirit. It’s true, the situation seems difficult for the moment. But, as you know and as is often said, “the more conditions are difficult, the more daring is necessary.” (...)

My brothers, I found no better way to finish these words than to repeat those of our Founder who, at the end of a General Chapter, gave a mission kick-off to his brothers by reminding them of the essential, that is to say unity: *“Now, my Fathers and my Brothers, our work is finished; let us bless God for having inspired us with these unanimous views, those energetic resolutions that we all promise to develop and maintain with fervor and intelligence. Let us always have this true affection for each other. based on respect and the need to hold ourselves tightly together; let’s be one body in the sincerity of our souls and the loyal frankness of our relationships; that our indissoluble link be Jesus Christ.”* (E.S. p. 146) »

Fr NGOA Ya Tshihemba
Superior General

Mgr Gschwind, first Assumptionist bishop in France

The Assumption had certainly already given bishops to the Church. But the 15th of them is the first to receive charge of a French diocese, that of Pamiers.



A solemn moment: after receiving the imposition of hands and the attributes of his office, the new bishop is installed on his cathedra.

For almost 30 years, from time to time, the same rumor has come up: an Assumptionist was going to become a bishop in France – which had never happened before. Names were circulating, but most have since died, without having received the purple cap. At the same time, our Congregation has seen its group of bishops dwindle, until it only has one left alone: Mgr Pelatre, Apostolic Vicar emeritus of Istanbul (read box, p. 12). Hence the surprise of October 28, when the Vatican announced the appointment of Fr. Bene-

dict Gschwind as bishop of Pamiers. In France!

This is how this former Provincial of Europe, who at the age of 60 was until then parish priest of

Saint-Augustin de l'Aqueduc in Montpellier, had to pack – quite quickly, he says – his bags for the department of Ariège, in the Pyrenees. It was not a great distance to go through, but a spectacular reconversion to accomplish. And the celebration of episcopal ordination, on November 26 in the cathedral of Mirepoix¹, made it possible to measure the step thus crossed.

It is indeed a mixture of determination and emotion that inhabited Father Benoît at the time where he was presented with the land and people entrusted to him: a rural and harsh country, plain and high mountains, with a fairly small but dispersed Christianity. The territory coincides with the department of Ariège (capital: Foix). Around twenty priests, all diocesan, including service to 110,000 Catholics, out of a population of 157,000. Emotion also when the Metropolitan Archbishop of Toulouse Mgr de Kerimel (the other consecrators were Mgr Turini, archbishop of Montpellier, and Mgr Rouet, archbishop emeritus of Poitiers, who had already ordained Benoit a deacon then priest!), let him take possession of his cathedra, once the gestures and words of ordination have been taken...

But also determination, as he wrote to his diocesans the day after his nomination: *“Responding presently to the call of Christ and the gospel has led me into diverse and varied missions. I have never been disappointed, and I have been given many times*

¹ The diocese of Pamiers was born from the merger of three former bishoprics: Pamiers, Couserans and Mirepoix. The latter's cathedral, being the largest of the three, was chosen for the circumstance.

to measure to what extent the Spirit worked at the heart of this world. » Likewise his debt clearly claimed towards his congregation, whose motto he took for that of his episcopate, proudly fixed to the high altar of Mirepoix: "What I am, I owe to my family, to my parents, to my religious congregation (...). The Assumption taught me to love Christ and his Church. She made me love working with passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God. " And his determination, finally, not to carry out his duties alone: "Together, we will work to the coming of the Kingdom of God, the announcement of the Good News of the Gospel, in a dialogue permanent with all those who live in this department of Ariège. »

Another letter addressed upon his appointment by the new bishop, this time to his brothers and sisters of the Assumption family, says his thanksgiving for all he owes her, but also count on our prayer "in these days when Christ calls me, once again, to leave everything to follow him"... but our prayer still, let us not doubt it, for all the days that will now make his episcopate.

Fr Michel KUBLER
(Rome)



In Mirepoix, after ordination, Bishop Gschwind's first contacts with the people entrusted to his care.



The journey of a future bishop

Born September 30, 1963 in Basel (Switzerland).
1984-1985: Novitiate in Lille;
1st profession on September 7, 1985.
1984-1991: Studies of theology in Strasbourg then Paris (ISPC).
Perpetual profession on the 24th September 1988. Ordained priest on February 9, 1991.
1991-1998: Diocese of Évry-Corbeil-Essonnes (diocesan chaplain of public education) and youth ministry in Île-de-France.

1998-2000: National Center for Religious Education (Adolescence sector)
1999-2011: Journalist at Bayard: editor then editor-in-chief of Prions en Église; director of the editorial offices of liturgical magazines.
At the same time, from 2002 to 2011: National Chaplaincy of the Scouts of France.
2011-2017: Provincial of France, then of Europe (2014)
2017-2023: In Montpellier, parish priest at Saint-Augustin de l'Aqueduc.

The 15 Assumptionist bishops

1) **Mgr Louis PETIT**, born in Viuz-la-Chiésaz (Haute-Savoie, France) on 02.21.1868, died in Menton (Alpes-Maritimes, France) on 05.11.1927. Latin Archbishop of Athens, apostolic delegate to Greece, from 1912 to 1926.

2) **Mgr Pie NEVEU**, born in Gien (Loiret, France) on February 23, 1877, died in Paris (France) on 10/17/1946. Apostolic administrator of Moscow (USSR) from 1926 until his death.

3) **Mgr Henri PIERARD**, born in Félenne (Belgium) on June 21, 1893, died in Louvain (Belgium) on 03/05/1975. Apostolic vicar (1938) then bishop of Beni (Congo Belge) from 1959 to 1966.

4) **Mgr Antonio VUCCINO (or VOUSINOS)**, born in Galissa (Greece) on 08.05.1891, died in Néa-Smyrni (Greece) on April 23, 1978. Bishop of Syros and Milos (1937), then Archbishop of Corfu from 1947 to 1952.

5) **Mgr Andrew BECK**, born in Streatham (Great Britain) on 05.28.1904, died in Liverpool (Great Britain) on September 13, 1978. Coadjutor (1948) then bishop (1951) of Brentwood, Bishop of Salford (1955), then Archbishop of Liverpool from 1964 to 1976.

6) **Mgr Michel CANONNE**, born in Câteau-Cambrésis (North, France) on 27.12.1911, died in Montfermeil (Seine-Saint-Denis, France) on April 30, 1991. Bishop of Tuléar (Madagascar) from 1959 to 1974.

7) **Mgr Arthur HORSTHUIS**, born in Diepenveen (Netherlands) on July 17, 1912, died in Boxtel (Netherlands) on April 11, 1979. Bishop of Jales (Brazil) from 1960 to 1968.

8) **Mgr Antónios VARTHALITIS**, born in Varis (Greece) on 01.01.1924, died



Mgr Louis PETIT (1868-1927)

Nationalities

France 5
Bulgaria 2
Greece 2
Belgium 1
Brazil 1
Congo 1
Great Britain 1
Netherlands 1
Romania 1

Country when they exercised their ministry

Greece 3
Brazil 2
Bulgaria 2
Congo 2
France 1
Great Britain 1
Italy 1
Madagascar 1
Russia 1
Turkey 1

Participants at the Vatican 11 council

At the four sessions : Bishops Pierrard, Vaccino, Beck, Cristea, Canonne, Varthalitis (also Fr. Wilfrid Dufault, General Superior)
At the first and second sessions : Bishop Horthuis
Was prevented from participating in the council : Bishop Stratiev

Still living

2 (one active and one emeritus)

in Athens (Greece) on 27.10.2007. Archbishop of Corfu from 1962 to 2003, Apostolic Administrator, Church of Thessalonica from 1992 to 2003.

9) **Mgr Vasile CRISTEA**, born in Șomoștelnic (Romania) on February 24, 1906, died in Rome on 01/17/2000. Official bishop at the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (1960), then Apostolic visitor to Romanian Greek-Catholics in the diaspora from 1963 to 1987.

10) **Mgr Métodi STRATIEV**, born in Srem-Jambol (Bulgaria) on January 11, 1916, died in Sofia (Bulgaria) on 12.05.2006. Coadjutor (appointed in 1963, ordained in 1965) then exarch Apostolic Church of Sofia for Bulgarian Catholics of the Byzantine rite from 1971 to 1995.

11) **Mgr Samuel DJOUNDRINE**, born in Nicolaevo (Bulgaria) on April 27, 1920, died in Plovdiv (Bulgaria) on March 19, 1998. Bishop of Nicopoli from 1978 to 1994.

12) **Mgr Charles KAMBALE MBOGHA**, born in Kilubo (Belgian Congo) on 04.11.1942, died in Bukavu (DR Congo) on 09.10.2005. Bishop of Wamba (1990), then of Isiro (1995), then archbishop of Bukavu from 2001 to his death.

13) **Mgr Louis-Armel PELÂTRE**, born in Pancé (Ille-et-Vilaine, France) on 05.12.1940. Apostolic Vicar of Istanbul (Türkiye) from 1992 to 2016.

14) **Mgr José Geraldo DA CRUZ**, born in Muriaé (Brazil) on 08.08.1941, died in Muriaé on 04.04.2022. Bishop of Juazeiro (Brazil) from 2003 to 2016.

15) **Mgr Benoît GSCHWIND**, born in Basel (Switzerland) on September 30, 1963. Bishop of Pamiers (France) since 2023.

Towards an Asia-Oceania Vice-Province in 2029

Fr. Khuê, Vicar of Asia-Oceania, considers here the impacts of this deadline on the life and missions of the Assumption in the region.



The General Chapter of the Congregation of the Augustinian of the Assumption, held from 01 to 25 June 2023 in Rome, concluded with several decisive proposals. Among them is the decision to establish in the next six years of the vice-provinces from the vicariates of the Province of Europe: the vicariate of Afrique de l'Ouest and that of Asia-Oceania. This strong recommendation was taken into account at the second session of the Provincial Chapter of Europe, which endeavoured to establish a general time table for its implementation (see Acts of Chapters).

Far from being a voluntarist and ambitious idea, this project is located in the extension of the development of the Congregation understood as an apostolic body that lives the interdependence,

subsidiarity, etc, solidarity and transversality of. This evolution of structures according to these four characters will have great impacts on our state of and on our practices as religious of the vicariate.

First, the geography of Asia-Oceania will become sharper on the map of Assumption. We will no longer have communities in Asia, but a Vice-province of Assumption in Asia.

Second, the transition to the status of vice-province is a time of conversion. Until now, the religious of the vicariate were used to living in the environment well protected by the dear mother (the Province of Europe) and willingly complied with the guidance coming from elsewhere. Entry into the reality of the vice-province will require religious

people to come out of the shadows and walk on their own feet. This change forces them to convert in order to better know and live the spirit of the Assumption, its mission and its practices of religious life.

Thirdly, living the interculturality will be a demanding condition. Asian culture is known as a culture of diversities and peculiarities. Currently, the vicariate of Asia-Oceania brings together three very different realities of languages, cultural practices and economic, political, social and ecclesial context; not to mention the new realities to which the Spirit will guide us in the future.

Fourthly, to have apostolic creativity and audacity to bring about the Kingdom on this continent. These qualities also concern the inculturation of the charism and spirituality of the Assumption in the life of religious and in the concrete cultural environment of the peoples in Asia: the catholicity of our charism must be seen as good news for the peoples in Asia.

Fifth, autonomy of thought in governance, as well as in specific training orientations with a view to the mission. This element requires intellectual capacity : a general knowledge of the Congregation, sensitivity to local-regional realities and an authentic spiritual experience.

Fr Pierre TRẦN VĂN Khuê
(in Vicariat News n° 20,
octobre 2023)

A new sanctuary in Brazil

The diocesan promotion of the church of Vieiras is both a crowning achievement and a starting point for the local Assumption.



The Province of Brazil welcomed with great enthusiasm the news of the elevation of the parish church of Senhor Bom Jesus de Vieiras to the ranks of a sanctuary. The parish, founded in 1975, was assigned to the community of the Assumptionists of Eugenópolis since its beginnings. It is the smallest parish in the Province, but it is one where numerous pilgrims come to honor “Senhor Bom Jesus” (the good Lord, Jesus), a typical Luso-Brazilian devotion.

The news was greeted with much enthusiasm by parishioners and pilgrims, who were united at the opening Mass of the 73rd Jubilee of Senhor Bom Jesus, on September 7. At this Mass, the bishop of Leopoldina, dom Edson José Oriolo dos Santos, made the announcement of the decision to elevate the parish church to the ranks of a diocesan sanctuary. After much discussion with the bishop, the community of Eugenópolis announced that the installation of the sanctuary, with the rite of dedication for the church and the altar, would be celebrated on November 22, 2023. The

church had made significant renovations prior to this.

According to the document of the Holy See entitled “The sanctuary”, and the *Code of Canon Law* (canons 1230-1234), a sanctuary is a church or another sacred space, recognized by the authority of the local diocese, to which the faithful of other areas go for a pilgrimage, inspired by a particular piety. Such is the case of the parish church in Vieiras that, especially during Jubilee celebrations, from the 7th to 14th of September annually, receives a large number of pilgrims and faithful of different areas. They go to fulfill their promises and to witness to the graces and miracles that have been bestowed on them. This is why, says Pope Francis, a sanctuary is for all a place of memory, a sacred space where one goes to reflect on the actions of God that permeate our stories. It is where one confirms his faith and renews his alliance with all the faithful. The sanctuary is, therefore, a place for the sacraments, in particular the domicile of the Eucharist and of Reconcili-

ation. We religious will continue to accompany the community of the parish and of the pilgrims, by responding to all the needs associated with the pastoral mission of the sanctuary.

Another important dimension of a sanctuary is thanksgiving. Because this sacred space does not imprison God, but is a symbol of the presence among the people: here, the faithful are called to give thanks for all that we have received from Him. It is the experience of the Jewish people, described in the psalms as pilgrims coming from throughout Israel who, in approaching the holy city of Jerusalem, sang with joy on arriving at the gates of the city where was found the sanctuary of the living God.

A sign of hope and a place to announce God's Word, the sanctuary of Senhor Bom Jesus de Vieiras will be open to welcome pilgrims and the faithful. The mystery of the Cross is particularly honored in this church, since it was the first devotion of the explorers of the region, who during the second half of the 19th century, founded a little village called Santa Cruz da Babilônia, at the mouth of the Serrinha and Inhambú Rivers, at the heart of the vast Babilônia Farm. In fact, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14 is the culmination of the Jubilee each year. It has been celebrated since 1951, with the authorization of the diocese, and since 1958, with the approval of the Holy See, which grants a plenary indulgence to the faithful who come and receive an apostolic blessing.

For the faithful and the religious who work there, the elevation of the mother church of Vieiras to a sanctuary is the crowning glory and the starting point of a work. Crowning, because it is the fruit



of a long history of faith and confidence in the Good God, always ready to give blessings and graces to his people. It is also a starting point, because the community is firmly engaged in following the works of the gospels, in broadening its work and in organizing more and more, to witness to the faith and the welcome, among the faithful pilgrims. The fact that the sanctuary exists today is because a pilgrim, in a moment of deep distress, went to pray at Congonhas and he brought the devotion to the little village of Santa Cruz de Babilônia, after having obtained a huge miracle.

The coat of arms created like symbols of the sanctuary show the cross at the center, on a red base that represents the mocking cloak with which the soldiers clothed Our Lord before Pilate presented him to the crowd, with the words "Ecce Homo" designating him as such, without his knowing, as the model of all human creatures: everyone of us, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, must reach the state of a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).

The Sacred Wood stands out against a scarlet background, the

Tree of Life, since the Mystery of the Cross was the first devotion that the pioneers brought to the region. Between the two sacred branches is the crown of thorns, that represents the offending royalty of the Divine Savior and symbolizing the manner in which Jesus established the friendship between God and man, since thorns represent the condition of man, estranged from God after the Fall. Under the horizontal wood, the coat of arms make reference to the Assumptionists, entrusted to guard the Sanctuary. Under the right arm of the cross, is a triple star denoting our charism, central to the unity of Christ through our internal life, to which Mary is the model; unity among the brothers, because of their fraternal life; and unity with the Church through apostolic engagements.

Under the left arm of the cross, is inscribed ART, "*Adveniat Regnum tuum*", topped by a crown. Through the merits of Christ, we pass from the crown of thorns to the crown of glory, a royal diadem of sons readmitted to the house of the Father, coheirs of Christ. Each of us must welcome the Kingdom, first within ourselves, then proclaim it to the world.

Fr Marcos Antônio DIAS
(Eugenópolis, Brazil)

The Assumption at the “Entretiens de Valpré” meeting

Every year, our center in Ecully brings together hundreds of concerned business leaders and executives in search of meaning in their work: a challenge also for the Congregation.



It's the story of an architect who meets three stonemasons and asks each one what they are currently doing. The first, who carries out his work mechanically, replies that he is cutting a stone. The second, who does the same work but in a slightly less mechanical way, explains that he works on a stone to build a wall. He then approaches the third, who seems radiant, and asks him what he is doing. He responds with a broad smile: "I'm building a cathedral." This is how Jean Rouche describes the work, which

can be seen as a punishment (1) or on the contrary like a task that elevates man by giving meaning. This former SNCF director of the South East TGV intervened during the Entretiens de Valpré, created in 2002 and bringing together, on November 17-18, business leaders, executives, entrepreneurs and students to promote inspiration, exchange and experience on the key issues of the economy, business, and society in the light of Christian social thought. Their theme this year: "Topsy-turvy work".

(1) Work as punishment corresponds to the etymological meaning, in reference to tripalium, an instrument of torture.

Deconstructing myths about meaning at work

The Valpré chapel, transformed for the occasion into a packed conference room, formed a studious assembly. From 8 a.m., Jean-Dominique Senard, chairman of the group's board of directors at Renault spoke of the importance of the "polar star", the vision that gives meaning to work. After him, Jean-Baptiste Barféty, general inspector of social affairs, recalled the seriousness of the question since 59% of those under 35 are ready to change jobs to find more meaning.

This question is not new. Already in 1944, the Philadelphia Declaration emphasized that "all human beings, regardless of their race, creed or gender, have the right to pursue their material progress and their spiritual development in freedom and dignity, in economic security and with equal opportunities. The opportunity for Cyril Cosme, director for France of the International Labor Organization (ILO), to recall this strong axis which has three components: self-interest, interest in society (environmental causes, social causes, etc.) and meaning for life as a citizen.

Meaning at work is not a matter for the rich in Western countries that are losing their bearings: the youth unemployment rate in China has increased sharply, now at 21% compared to 10% in 2019, pushing the government to no longer publish this statistic. In addition, the first suffering at work is not linked to the type of work, but to the fact of not being able to do what we have to do correctly.

Rebuild by identifying a common meaning at work

In a society where work is fragmented, finding common meaning is a challenge. Dispositions inconsistent or even contradictory make the search for meaning even more complex. Resuming the allegory of the stonecutter, the economist Pierre-Yves Gomez underlined the importance, for a business leader, to maintain over time the course that gives



meaning to work: the stonemason who would learn that his cathedral will ultimately become a garage, then a parking lot, will inevitably lose meaning in his activity.

The posture of those responsible plays an essential role, first of all not to cause harm [2], then enable employees to continue learning. President of a foundation helping disabled people to integrate into the world of work, Jean-Marc Richard identifies three objectives in this sense: allow teams to experience learning rather than repetitive tasks, find models, have the desire to transmit.

However, work does not sum up an individual's life. The Christian life indeed adds a contemplative dimension, allowing you to question yourself, whether in everyday life or during moments of transition (job change). Hence the question posed in conclusion by Mgr Olivier de Germy, archbishop of Lyon: what is my spiritual lifestyle? what measures do I put in place to avoid being caught through activism?

These two days of interviews thus had the (prophetic?) virtue of also questioning our religious communities on the essential role of the relationship to work of our contemporaries, and on its issues for the growth of individuals and our societies.

Cyril SUTTER
(postulant, Paris-Morère)

(2) A reference to the oath of Hippocrate vowed by physicians.

At Burkina Faso, the refugees are at our door

Through several initiatives, the scholastic community has shown its closeness to people displaced internally.

Last June, the community at Ouagadougou organized its 2nd Maracaña tournament, for the benefit of children whose families have been displaced from Pazani, a village north of the capital of Ougadougou. The goal is to create networks of fraternity with the “internally displaced persons » (PDI) in promoting social connections, mutual acceptance, and a culture of friendly encounters and dialogue through sports.

Fr. Donatien Vula, Superior of the community, was careful to point out: “This initiative translates our social engagement into a reality of the gospels, through our service toward the promotion of humanity. It is part of our mission as Assumptionists, which is to work, through our love of Christ, for the coming of the Kingdom of God in us and around us.” Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been prey to terrorist attacks. The recurrence of these attacks forces the people of the region to flee to

other areas that are more peaceful and secure. Because of this, most of those who arrive at Pazani have escaped from the fury of the menacing terrorists, which has become more frequent and more deadly. Considering this troublesome security situation, the community of Ouagadougou has taken certain steps, like the sponsorship of three children, the organization of a soccer tournament, and the collection of contributions (clothing, shoes, rice). The gifts are thanks to Lenten collections, and they are in conjunction with the Union of Major Superiors of Burkina-Niger (USBN).

This year, to organize the Maracana Tournament, our scholastic community received financial aid of 450 Euros from the lay of the Christian community of Valpré. They were also put into contact with Mr. Samuel Calkoumodo, Special Councilor of the President of the Transition of Burkina Faso, in charge of social cohesion and national reconciliation. He agreed

to be the sponsor of the 2nd Annual Tournament and to support us financially and materially.

The brothers of the community, the children concerned, as well as their coaches and some members of the Lay Alliance, were firmly mobilized for the success of this tournament, which has been renamed “tournament of brotherhood.” In all, sixteen teams competed in a friendly atmosphere. The final day, two matches were organized--- the first with two girls’ teams and the second with the two finalists of the tournament. The evening ended with the distribution of prizes to all the teams who participated and a performance by two artists, one a refugee from Pazani and the other a religious sister. To those who supported us in this endeavor and to those who wish to help us in this adventure toward the Kingdom, thank you is a word that rewards you far beyond your commitment.

**The Community of Ouagadougou
(Burkina Faso, West Africa)**



A century of Assumptionist presence in Romania

A series of events last September enabled, in Bucharest then Blaj, to celebrate the centenary of the arrival of the Congregation in this country.

Pilgrimage to Blaj: here, in the «Archbishops' Chapel», a former Assumptionist parish.



One hundred years ago (September 1923) in Blaj, the first Assumptionists arrived in Romania. Very quickly, other communities (Beius, Lugoj and Bucharest) continued this presence, that was deployed above all in the Greek-Catholic Church (of Byzantine rite) and at the express invitation of the latter.

It must be said that these hundred years of presence were far from resembling a long tranquil river. In 1948, in the context of suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church by the new Communist regime (interestingly enough, with Ukraine, in all the history of Christianity), the Assumptionists were expelled and their communities closed. The religious, who were Romanian, were forced to return to their families. For some though, it meant years of hard labor and imprisonment.

It is important to note that the Assumptionist presence, despite the absence of communities, stayed uninterrupted in Romania during all of this time thanks to the stubbornness of our brothers who

did not abandon either the Greek-Catholic Church or their religious family. This « Assumption of the catacombs » last for more than 40 years: up until Communism fell in 1989.

The 90's were marked by a new era in the implantation of the Assumption in Romania, with the opening of a new community in Mărgineni (in the province of Moldavia) and the reopening of others, among them Blaj and Bucharest.

The jubilee was organized last September from the 14th-19th by Cardinal Lucian Muresan, Major Archbishop of Fagaras, and Alba Iulia, spiritual head of the Greek-Catholics in Romania. They wanted to acknowledge, in the message they sent to the Congregation, this presence calling it *prophetic*. The participants of the celebration of these one hundred years could appreciate these *luminous figures*, according to Cardinal Muresan---religious such as Fr. Bernard Stef, Fr. Teofil Pop and Br. Gavril Muntean, who are still alive today. ▶

Certainly, there is always that nostalgia surrounding the departure of the Assumptionists from Blaj: a town which, in the words of one of the speakers: „is no longer the same” since the Assumptionist departure. There is remaining an immense debt to these religious who fashioned a human and spiritual journey for a large number of the Greek-Catholic priests including the Major Archbishop. As was said by Fr. Critian Barta, Dean of the Faculty of Greek-Catholic Theology of Blaj: „the Assumptionists formed characters and they contributed to the resistance of the Greek-Catholic Church during the Communist persecution.”

Whether it is at Bucharest or at Blaj, the Assumptionist delegation, formed of religious (and some laity) coming from several European countries, were able to literally walk „in the footsteps” of their predecessors. At the same time, they can say that the Assumption today is very much alive and implanted, despite its fragility. But, isn't this proof that this century-old presence, though sometimes hanging on by a thread, has bounced back and risen from the ashes?

The mission that the Assumptionists continue to unfold, in Mărgineni or in Bucharest, is in keeping with the same fertile intuitions of those of yesteryear: work toward the unity of the Church, the welcoming and fostering of vocations among the youth, the unending taste for study and the wise understanding of Churches of the Orient, pastoral care for the most disadvantaged, the pilgrimages, diverse publications, etc. In this way, the Jubilee---which will extend throughout the year, until September 2024---should have as a goal not only to evoke a history of the past, but also to reaffirm the engagement of all of the Assumption for this country and, more generally, for all the Mission of the Orient.

**Fr Iulian DANCĂ
(Paris)**

**The Article appeared in the bulletin
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One hundred years that permit the Assumption to “breathe with both lungs”

**Excerpts from the letter
of Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba,
Superior General, to the religious of
Romania (September 14, 2023):**

“It has been one hundred years since a religious adventure began. Some religious, moved by the Spirit and responding to the call of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, settled in this land for life and for a mission. In fact, this mission has the special privilege of having been on the mind of our founder as early as 1862, when he planned to visit Bucharest as early as February 1863. It is a story that is more than one hundred years old. More than one hundred years that evoke personal and collective memories, are filled with joys and difficulties. Today, now that we celebrate these one hundred years, the signs that we hoped for are still there. (. . .)

In celebrating our centennial on Romanian soil, we honor our brothers who were huge actors in the mission, whether it was in the foundations or in the persecutions. (. . .)

The love of the Church and of her Unity, major elements of our charism, stimulate, motivate, and sustain our hope for the future of our congregation here. There is no doubt that the work and the visits marking these days of the centennial celebration will allow us to delve even deeper. (. . .)

To all the brothers and sisters, religious and lay, who with their modest collaboration for the mission of all the Church and of the Assumption, in particular, have accepted to keep our hope alive, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude: the entire congregation is with you. My prayers go with you. May the Spirit, that pushed our founder Emmanuel d'Alzon to imagine a foundation in Romania, help you to continue to believe in the importance of our mission on this earth, and that it gives you the strength to continue, despite signs of discouragement. May our Mother the Virgin Mary intercede for the Assumption in Romania.”

A 100 year history of Romania

- September 1923 : Fr. Evrard and Mercks arrive at Blaj from the mission of Constantinople
- 1924-1926 : Implantation of the Byzantine Rite in Transylvania: after Blaj, Beius (1924) and Lugoj (1926).
- 1925 : First foundation of the Oblates of the Assumption at Beius.
- 1928 : Creation of a weekly review, Observatorul.
- 1929 : Erection of the Vicariate of Romania
- 1934 : Foundation of a community of the Byzantine Rite in Bucharest (Frs. Barral and Tiburee).
- 1938 : Transferral to Bucharest of the Institute of Byzantine Studies (religious of the Latin Rite under the guidance of Fr. Vitalien Laurent) pushed out of Turkey, becoming IFEB
- 1947 : Closing of the Institute, followed by the expulsion of foreign religious. Romania was proclaimed Popular Republic, Communism seized control of the country, now under Soviet control.
- 1948 : Suppression of the Greek-Catholic Romanian Church and arrest of Romanian religious, many condemned to prison or to hard labor.
- December 1989 : Fall of the Communist regime and execution of President Ceausescu.
- 1992 : Opening of the house of Mărginen (Moldavia, of the Latin Rite), with Frs. Hervé Stéphan and Maurice Laurent
- September 2010: Refounding of the house at Bucharest (ex-IFEB), becoming „the Center of St. Peter-St. Andrew” with an ecumenical vocation

From 1923 to 1990, 24 foreign Assumptionists worked in Romania, while 23 Romanians have made perpetual profession within the Congregation.

“Witness of God under Communism”



Fr. Lucian Dincă, superior of the Bucharest community, was able to consult the files of the Assumptionists in the archives of the “Security”, the sinister political police of the Romanian Communist regime. Below are some excerpts from the preface of this work, accessible in Romanian and also in French.¹

In this work, I will present the iconic figures of Assumptionists who suffered prison under the Communist regime and who have dossiers in their names for being sued to find charges against them and have them convicted. They were all part of the Greco-Catholic rite and that this Church was suppressed in Romania by government decree in 1948. All the Assumptionists entered the resistance, without accepting any compromise, either with the State, or with the Orthodox Church that promised them high status should they decide to make the change to this Church. (. . .)

The reader made himself familiar with this book, first, with the French Fathers who were active in their mission at the IFEB, (then) the figures of the Romanian fathers who held the torch of Assumptionist charism in Com-

munist Romania: Fathers Berinde Stefan, Liviu Lelutiu, Bernard Stef, Teofil Pop, and Vamvulescu Anton, and Fathers Emilian Indrea and Petru Bîrsan. The question that remained with me after my reading of more than 10,000 pages of 28 dossiers of the Security is the following: what would we have done in their place in the context that was theirs? That is why I bear no judgment, no accusation, no ulterior motive either on their lives, or in their choices on how they lived their religious lives. (. . .)

In the dossiers of the Security there are some things to take and some things to let go. All is not true, all is not false, and often the officers had to write their reports or extract statements from informants or defendants to make themselves look good to their superiors. Everyone was chasing everyone else. Everyone informed on everyone. Therefore, in my analysis I tried to maintain a certain balance in my affirmations, all the while also presenting the opinions of the officers to see how far their zeal or the Marxist-Leninist indoctrination that dominated the country for 44 years could go.

The only thing that motivated the Assumptionists throughout this entire adventure during the traversing of the dark tunnel, wherein they didn't see the end, was the faith that they were sharing in the sacrifice of Christ, who did not wish to be considered equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the condition of a servant to the point of dying, and dying on a cross (Eph 2:6-9).

¹ *Témoins du Christ sous le communisme. Les Pères assomptionnistes dans les dossiers policiers de la Securitate roumaine*, de Lucian Dincă. Ed. Orizons, 602 p., 49 €.

Father d'Alzon and women

Part 1: A pampered childhood

Which women counted in the life of Father d'Alzon? What was their role in his vocation and their place in his ministry? But at a time when the Church faces numerous scandals, our Founder reminds us of the essentials in the relationship with women: great personal purity and respect for the freedom of others.

Emmanuel d'Alzon is best known for his male friendships. He liked to surround himself with men with whom to share the same goals: the search for God, the defense of religion, the education of young people, the unity and mission of the Church. He met them on the paths of his ministry or his political commitment, through the great debates of his time and of course within the congregation itself. But those around him could also be very feminine.

The women of his childhood

Her mother, Marie-Jeanne-Clémence Faventines de Montredon (1788-1860), was the daughter of Louis Faventines of Montredon and his wife Anne-Françoise Liron of Airoles. She was also the niece of Clément de Faventines, lord of Condamine, and his wife Louise- Marie-Joséphine, born Daudé d'Alzon. Without children, this couple legally adopted the little one Clémence in 1802. She thus became the sole heir to their immense fortune. Indeed :

"The Faventines, former general farmers under the last two kings, had acquired a considerable fortune and very honestly, because they were never, even at the worst hours of the Terror, the object of the slightest suspicion. They had added to their heritage hereditary property of the viscounty of d'Alzon, other lands in the Cévennes and an immense territory in the Hérault plain." (1)

Like many aristocrats, they were denounced during the French Revolution.



Marie Clémence de Faventines, Viscountess d'Alzon (1788-1860)

Threatened with death after their attempt to escape, they were arrested in Valence (Drôme). Not retaining any anti-citizen activity against them, the revolutionary authorities had them sent back to Vigan where they were imprisoned for two years. Some of their parents had preceded them in the dungeon, such as their cousin Marie-Elisabeth de Guibal de Combescure, wife of Viscount Bonald. Prison was their

salvation. Released in 1795, they were able to return to their house in Vigan, La Condamine, and find all their belongings thanks to André Henri Daudé d'Alzon (1774-1864).

Raised far from his parents and without fortune, Henri had also been taken in by his cousins from Vigan. He found a family among them. Having to provide for his needs, he exercised the modest job of clerk. Appointed prosecutor responsible for the recovery of family property, Henri carried out his mission marvelously. He did not yet know that this success would ensure his own home a very enviable financial situation: *"The fortune of the d'Alzons, estimated at several million francs, consisted above all of vast and rich estates extending especially around the castle of Lavagnac and the ancestral home of Vigan. All belonged to the mother."* (2)

His father Henri: a calm and reserved temperament

Clémence therefore met her future husband within the family home. Henri d'Alzon was his distant cousin and became her husband in 1806. Deprived too early of the affection of his family, he had

learned to keep his feelings to himself. With a calm temperament, he counted his words. This reserved character did not prevent an excellent relationship with his children, even at a distance. In testimony of this is the correspondence of young Emmanuel with his "dad", deputy in Paris: *"I beg that this House and these ministers do not make you forget your little darlings who always think of you. Farewell, my dear dad. I am and always will be your very affectionate son."*



Father d'Alzon in his portrait at 10 years old

His mother Clémence: a cheerful and determined chatelaine

Unlike Clémence, Emmanuel's mother, was of a lively and cheerful nature, quick to speak, responds and quick to attack if necessary. Father Emmanuel Bailly did not know her personally, but he paints a detailed portrait of her thanks to the confidences of Father d'Alzon:

"She had made Lavagnac a home of spirit, life and enthusiasm. His faith and works recalled

the great Christian woman and the noble chatelaine of another age. It is said that his son, had, in his character as in his mind, more than one trait of resemblance with his mother, to whom he attributed a large part in his early education. This great Christian had placed the castle on a footing of princely distinction, which imposed it on all guests and significantly raised the level of the children; a remarkable simplicity further added to this stamp of dignity and grandeur."

Between mother and son, a relationship of affection and respect

The relationship between D'Alzon and his mother was always marked by great tenderness, troubled only by Emmanuel's repeated requests to collect his share in advance of inheritance. Both suffered from it, and D'Alzon first, in the face of maternal reproaches concerning the management of his works. For her part, the mother suffered from disappointing him when she considered refusal preferable to everyone's interests. Father D'Alzon was independent financially for his establishment in Nîmes, but unfortunately not for his works, that the family financed almost entirely. However, nothing could undermine the affection and esteem that they held for each other. Siméon Vailhé will say that "this mother loved nothing so much after God than his Emmanuel" (3).

Inheriting his mother's generosity excluding any lavishness

One day when Emmanuel once again asked the Viscountess for a large sum to pay off an urgent debt, a brave woman visiting Lavagnac witnessed the dissatisfaction of the mother and saw fit to deplore with her the imprudence of the son. The response was scathing: "*If my son had spent all that money on disorder and debauchery, we would find no fault; it's for God, we fall on him. Know, Madam, what a glory it is.*" (4)

Provident in the management of her fortune, Clémence nevertheless showed herself to be as generous as his son. She had established near the castle a refuge for beggars to serve them a daily

soup. As a child, Emmanuel hid behind the door to listen to them talk between them and wanted to understand what they were going through.

The Viscountess was less accommodating with her employees, farmers or sharecroppers, especially during the bad years when they could no longer pay the royalty: she had noticed that they still came to the castle to stock up on wine that the viscount gave them for free: "*What's the point of tormenting them?*" he said to his wife. *If they didn't have harvest, they cannot pay what they owe us. - Without doubt, she replied, but what are they looking for here? - Hey! wine, since they don't have any.* » The water not being there favorite drink in this wine-growing region, the vis-

countess eventually gave in and joined forces with the generosity of her husband.

The friend of the poor, the model of the rich

Mgr Besson gave a glowing portrait of Clémence: "*A mother, at the same time gentle, strong, amiable*

and gracious, the friend of the poor, the model of the rich, the providence and charm of all country. » (5) This character rubbed off on Father d'Alzon, who recognized it. Three days after her death, he declared: "*My mother had to suppress, all her life, a character of the type of that of Mr. her son.*" (6)

Both had a noble and strong character, the spontaneity of peo-

The child with the bird
 painted by Marie Pauline Lebrun on September 20, 1824



ple from the South, a spirit biting and sometimes even mocking. This could create sparks when they defended opposing interests face to face. In the South of France, the response often follows closely the attack. Fortunately, since childhood, Emmanuel had the gift of humbly recognizing his wrongs and he immediately asked for forgiveness. If he was not always in control of his nerves, he always knew how to be of his will.

Two little sisters...

Augustine-Marie-Jeanne was born on March 21, 1813. Three years younger than Emmanuel, companion of her childhood games, she did not marry and remained with her parents all her life.

A painter in her spare time, she had the gift of wonderfully capturing the traits of a personality, both literally and figuratively. She was filled with a great love of the poor who seemed hereditary in this family. As cultured as her brother, she spoke several languages like him. Her faith was enlightened and deep.

Emmanuel for a moment wanted to marry her to one of his best friends, who unfortunately disdained it. Already shy, Augustine withdrew further into herself. Her insight made her notice the faults of each suitor. *"She knew how to want to refuse, never to accept,"* commented Father d'Alzon one day. Augustine thought of the convent, before giving it up seeing the difficulties and disadvantages. She finally decided to stay with her parents, *"free and confined at the same time"*, and lived in self-sacrifice and disinterestedness until his premature death at the age of 47.

Augustine obeyed her parents like a child. All her life, she sacrificed her tastes and her desires

with the sole desire to please them. We could barely guess what she wanted as she hid her disappointments or torments under an always smiling face. Voluntary victim of his duty, she spent her life forgetting herself by persuading others that she had reached the most perfect happiness.

On the day of her death, which was also her father's birthday, she had the courage to tell him to make a bouquet of flowers that Henri kept as a relic. She vowed a real worship of his father. But she was also very close to her brother. On her birthday in 1853, having received from Emmanuel wishes for a long life, she replied to him: *"Today, there is forty years that I have loved you."* » (7)

The little ones have long remembered his charity. A peasant woman testifies: *"For thirty-five years, I have only thought of God and Miss Augustine. When she arrived, it seemed like it was the Blessed Virgin who appeared. She was so good, so humble! She took the last seat or even sat on the floor, when she came to our house, and then, there, she taught us little children school, taught us to read, to sew; she taught us catechism and she killed herself to the task. We offered her to rest, to have something; she didn't even want to accept a glass of water, she who gave so much alms! Mrs d'Alzon happened to pass through the village, as she feared and blamed the excesses of dedication of her daughter."* » (8)

Marie-Françoise was born on May 18, 1819. Emmanuel nicknamed her "Positive Marion". Their bond was so close that they joined in their deepest aspirations and especially in faith. Every summer, still in college and even after, Emmanuel took care

of her education, made her read and corrected her homework. He knew how to transmit to her the nobility and strength of his character. This preparation will be very useful when it comes to overcome the trials and sorrows of her existence.

In 1837, she married Jacques Anatole de Chastenot, Viscount of Puységur (1813-1851). Two tragedies would soon darken their happiness. Returning from Austria where the couple had visited the Count of Chambord, Anatole fell seriously ill. Narrowly escaping upon death, he never regained his health and died six years later after much suffering. Before the trip, in the fall of 1845, the couple had barely lost a little girl, aged five years. She fell to her death on the steps of the Lavagnac chapel after

having placed a bouquet at the altar of the Virgin. This second niece was the joy of Father d'Alzon

and the separation was very painful to him. But he recognizes that she helped him to give definitely to God:

"The memory of my poor Marthe is still there; I miss her everywhere. I blame myself for not having gone to visit her little grave. Poor little angel! It was good for me that she was leaving, and God, who arranges everything with love, has charged her with untying many bonds, which, without her in heaven, would have been very hard for me to break. Amen." » (9)

Despite their trials, this couple allowed the D'Alzon family to survive. In 1896, a granddaughter of Marie-Françoise marries Count Robert de Suez d'Aulan. Their descendants resided in Lavagnac and operated the estate without interruption until its sale to a Japanese company in 1996. ▶



Appeal of the last victims of terror at Saint Lazare prison (1794)
 Painting by Müller, former student of Gros

...and a brother

Between Augustine and Marie-Françoise, we often forget the little brother. Jules-Marie-Esprit, born June 2, 1816, a Pentecost Sunday. Unfortunately, he was recalled to heaven two years afterwards, so that Emmanuel spent most of his childhood with his two sisters, especially Augustine (10).

Jules' godfather was Cardinal Jules Gabrielli, to whom the D'Alzon family had offered hospitality in 1814 at La Condamine. Emperor Napoleon I held him prisoner in France, like Pope Pius VII, for five years. He was finally assigned to Vigan. He stayed with them for two and a half months and taught Clémence Italian. Returning to Rome, the cardinal agreed to be the child's godfather.

A primary education in a protective and rather feminine environment

From his mother, Emmanuel learned charity but also rigor. The lesson was very useful to him, both his disdain for money and his character as a great lord exposed him to confusing charity and prodigality. The company of his sisters probably softened the rough edges of his temperament.

brought to domination. Finally, the example of his father, a man of religion and great righteousness, was in itself "*preaching and the best brake*".

We can judge from these lines that Henri wrote for Emmanuel on the eve of his first communion: "*I spoke to you sometimes about your too ardent taste for pleasure. Some innocent as those you can take, you must nevertheless try, my dear child, to moderate the attraction with which you approach it. From permissible pleasures that we take without restraint one passes imperceptibly to those who are not. It is by this path that the demon seeks especially to make poor young people fall into the traps he sets for their innocence. The older you get, the more effort he will make to make you lose yours and diminish the horror that you must have for everything that can tarnish in you your holy virtue of purity. Oh ! my poor Emmanuel, neglect nothing to preserve this precious treasure! In this great day when the good Lord is going to give you so many graces, pray to him from the bottom of your heart to grant you this one in particular, Ask him to also grant you that of correcting you in all faults to which you can rec-*

ognize yourself subject, and above all, above all finally, that of never mortally offend him. » (11)

About his childhood, D'Alzon regretted having been raised "in a hothouse", surrounded by the love of his family and protected from bad influences. Sometimes we want contrary to what we have known. But it is permissible here to wonder: the young Emmanuel would he have developed the same purity in a boarding school? Would he have preserved his piety in contact of comrades less fervent than him? Would he have had the same ease in relating to others, whatever his environment, far from Lavagnac where lords, servants and peasants formed a family? Would he have developed the same horror of pride in a school of young arrogant or sometimes haughty aristocrats? His purity and his faith could only be consolidated over time. next to loved ones who set a good example for him.

P. Vincent LECLERCQ
 General Postulator

- 1) Siméon Vailhé, Life of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon volume 1, p. 17-18.
- 2) Id. p. 132
- 3) Id. p. 20
- 4) Id. p. 20
- 5) Id. p. 12.
- 6) Id. p. 132
- 7) Id. p. 28.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Cf Letter from Father d'Alzon to Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, October 21, 1845.
- 10) Siméon Vailhé, Life of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon volume 1, p. 11.
- 11) The ceremony should have taken place in May 1824 in the Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin church where Emmanuel had attended catechism. Due to a lung infection, it was postponed until July 1, 1824 in the Saint-Sulpice church. Cf Letters from Father d'Alzon, t. I, page 430 and n. 3, to Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, May 20 1854.

Create a culture of protection against abuse

In Rome, the congregations are undertaking long-term work to raise religious awareness and religious organizations to prevent abuse of minors or vulnerable people.

According to our 34th General Chapter, “prevention against sexual abuse of minor or vulnerable persons and the fight against all forms of abuse must become everywhere major, central and priority subjects for the Church and for the Assumption” (n. 237). The same spirit led the workshop organized from November 6 to 10 in Rome by the Union of General Superiors (UISG/USG).

133 people responsible for the protection of minors from 90 institutes came together male and female. The objectives of this time of discussion and formation were: to introduce effective progress towards a culture of protection, learning about the reality and experiences of abuse in society and in the Church, explore the treatment of allegations and the care to bring to the victims, as well as communication with the people directly or indirectly concerned by cases of abuse, and finally learn to prevent abuse in our communities and places of apostolate.

The workshop constituted a fraternal framework of mutual knowledge, formation and sharing of information for the gradual establishment of a culture of protection against various forms of abuse within our communities and our works. It was mainly about us to listen to our experiences, to listen to victims/sur-

vivors of abuse (sexual or spiritual), to share knowledge on the reality of abuse in the Church. It also wore on what should be done with allegations of abuse, how to collect them, respect for rights and the dignity of the victim as well as the accused person, the support to be provided equally to each other as well as to the community and to society.

The atmosphere of trust and openness, sharing and prayer helped to create an environment that encouraged participants to think, easily ask questions and engage in fruitful exchanges around various linguistic tables enriched by cultural diversity of members.

In detail, it involved formation in the stages of establishing the culture of safeguarding, through protection and prevention against all forms of abuse. But before this, it was necessary to start by sharing the information allowing us to take stock of the situation of abuse of children and vulnerable adults, including nuns and young people in formation.

The participants were particularly struck by listening to the testimony of two survivors (victims) of abuse. The pain and effects of the abuse on their lives were evident in what they shared. These testimonies aroused a desire for more sustained commitment on the part of the participants, to



make the Church and our various congregations safe places where everyone, children and adults, should feel safe from possible abuse. This commitment actually consists of raising awareness among members of congregations to the need for respect for people and personal and collective commitment to ensure everyone has the protection they need. In short, this workshop was a time of reflection from which the members of the International Union of General Superiors (UISG/USG) are committed to creating a culture of protection and making this evangelical culture effective in the different congregations and ministries of the members.

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Our Deceased Brothers



† Father **Libert LOWET**, of the Province of Europe, died on October 25, 2023, in Leuven (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on October 31, in Saint-Gertrude de Leuven Church. He was 97.

† Father **Claude MARÉCHAL**, of the Albertville community (European Province), died on October 28, 2023, in Albertville, France. His funeral was celebrated on November 3, in the Chapel of Notre-Dame des Vignes. He was 88.

† Father **Roberto FAVRE**, of the Nuestra Señora de Lourdes community (Andean Province), died on December 28, 2023, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His funeral was celebrated on December 29, in the sanctuary of the Nuestra Señora of Lourdes in Buenos Aires. His interment followed in the crypt of the community. He was 90.

† Brother **Michel BELLANGER**, of the Albertville community (European Province), died on December 29, 2023, in Albertville, France. His funeral was celebrated on January 3, in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Vignes. He was 91.