

2012 - Ploërmel
BROTHERS' GENERAL
CHAPTER

Letter n° 5
to the Mennaisian Family

Rome

May 2011

From March 1 to 25, 2012, at the Brothers' Mother House in Ploërmel, will be held the 26th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction.

This is quite an important event for the Brothers, but also for all the members of the Mennaisian Family, as well as for the youth in our Mennaisian schools. (See Note 1)

I would like to take some time to present this event to all those who identify themselves as members of the large Mennaisian Family. More than that, I would like to associate them to its preparation. The importance of the issues will become clear as you read the following lines.

✓ **WHAT IS A GENERAL CHAPTER?**

The word "Chapter" does not refer to part of a book. Rather, it refers to a gathering of religious. The custom of having Chapters goes way back in the tradition of religious Orders, and has gone on until Vatican Council II which made these Assemblies the keystone of the renewal of religious congregations.

This Assembly represents the supreme authority of a religious congregation. Its mission is to see to the vitality of the Charism. This is why it must remain attentive to the calls of the Holy Spirit expressed through calls from the Church and from the world. This Assembly determines for the whole of the Congregation the major orientations that will give the increase to the gift the Lord has bestowed on the Congregation for its service to the little ones and to the poor. Likewise, this Assembly is responsible for drafting or modifying the Rule of Life of the Brothers, it elects the Superior General and his Council and entrusts to them the responsibility of enacting the decisions taken at the Chapter. It has a legislative function.

The Chapter is also a sign of the unity and charity that are lived among all the members of the Institute. It is a manifestation of that unity of which the Church is the sacrament. A Chapter is a Church event.

Note 1:

Number of students per country, in our Mennaisian institutions

Country	Number of students
Argentina	4.652
Benin	469
Bolivia	6.500
Canada	2.283
DR Congo	1.300
Chili	1.597
Spain	6.681
USA	2.500
Philippines	967
France	32.859
Haiti	8.341
Indonesia	165
England	1.600
Italy	180
Japan	2.578
Kenya	266
Mexico	230
Polynesia	5.114
Rwanda	524
Senegal	1.060
Tanzania	5.090
Togo	3.403
Uganda	8.006
Uruguay	1.185
TOTAL	97.000

Note 2:

The Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction was founded by two priests: Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes. Both received the same inspiration of

the Spirit, one at St. Brieuç and the other at Auray. In their wisdom, they recognized the urgent need for Christian education, and combined their efforts for that mission, heedless of their own personal interests. They are for us models of communion and of solidarity, with the common will to do what is good for others.

Note 3:

Membership of the Chapter:

The Chapter will comprise 46 Brothers coming from each Province and Vice-Province of the Congregation.

From Europe, 12 Brothers,

from Africa, 12 Brothers,

from North America, 7 Brothers,

from South America, 2 Brothers,

from Asia, 2 Brothers,

from Haiti, 2 Brothers,

and from Polynesia, 1 Brother.

To these delegates must be added the Superior General and his Assistants, the former Superior General, and a few members of the General Administration.

Note 4:

From the text of preparation to the Synod in Rome – *The Lineamenta* – let us note these passages (n° 20): “Education increa-

✓ WHY DO WE HOLD A CHAPTER?

A congregation is born from an inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the heart of its Founder (see Note 2). Listening to the Lord whose love he strives to share with his people, the Founder answers a pressing call which leads him to gather companions around him and to put themselves at the service of children, the sick, strangers, the rejected, etc. in the name of Jesus.

As the new society grows and each of its members strives to live in accordance with the spirit of the given charism, it becomes imperative to set up an organization and to take decisions after a communal discernment. Chapters are thus held to allow the young congregation to come together to listen to the Word of God and to the confreres, and **to discern how the congregation must adapt its mission and live its charism** at a specific period of time and in given circumstances.

Where our Congregation is concerned, we have decided to hold a General Chapter every six years (see Note 3). Our last Chapters were held in Rome. This time, however, we chose to hold it in Ploërmel in the context of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

✓ WHAT WILL THE CHAPTER BE ABOUT?

The questions the Church is asking herself are the same questions the Congregation will be asking itself. In October 2012, a Synod (see Note 4) of the Bishops of the whole world will be held in Rome on the following theme: *A new evangelization for the transmission of Christian faith*. That same basic interrogation came out at the very first meeting of the Brothers in charge of the preparation for the Chapter. They found themselves on the same wavelength as the Church today, as she seeks how best to fulfill the fundamental mission of witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ who came to “save and give his life as a ransom for many”.

Again we heed what Pope Paul VI said in 1975: “*It would not be unprofitable for every Christian to pray over the following words: Men can be saved in other ways, through the mercy of God, even if we do not proclaim the Gospel to them; on the other hand, can we save ourselves if, out of negligence, fear or shame – what S. Paul was calling “to be put to shame” – we neglect to proclaim the Gospel?*”

Our Chapter will also make this call its own. It will try to discover how we can better “*educate and evangelize today.*” As befits our

charism at the service of education and instruction of the youth, the Chapter will reflect on the new ways we can propose the Gospel of Jesus Christ today as a source that opens to love and liberates life.

As members of the Mennaisian family, this is an issue that concerns us. We would like to share even more what makes us live and what incites us to give ourselves in love. We feel deeply that this Good News must be proclaimed, not silenced. We know that in the depth of our beings there is an invitation to overcome our personal limitations and to go forward and courageously point to the One whose heart is large enough to welcome the whole world in his Love. We would like to know how best to present to children and young people the “Messenger of Peace”. To those whom we encounter in our mission, we would like to say, as John the Baptist said, “This is the Lamb of God”, and then leave them free to follow Him if they so wish. We do not know how to do this, or we hesitate to do so.

These are the expectations and questions we share with you so as to discern the calls of the Spirit of the Lord.

✓ **WHAT WILL BE THE PARTICIPATION OF LAYPEOPLE?**

The General Chapter is an assembly representing the highest authority in the Congregation of the Brothers. It is not the Chapter of the Mennaisian family. However the Brothers are inviting Laypeople to join and share with them their hopes and their questions. As both **Brothers and Laypeople share in the same mission**, it is important indeed that some lay delegates come together to reflect on the orientations to be taken for the future.

The Laypeople will not participate in the Chapter itself but, during a few days, they will, through their presence, bring a valuable contribution to the common reflection. The Brothers, in their final orientations, will take that contribution into consideration, so as to remain faithful to the inspirations of the Spirit that were discerned together.

These days of sharing together, in the framework of the Mennaisian family, will witness to our communion and give us new strength to meet together the challenges of our times.

singly tends to be reduced to simply communicating to persons determined skills and teaching succeeding generations to gratify their desire for happiness through the products of consumerism or through short-lived self-gratification.

This constitutes the "educational emergency": we are no longer able to offer to the young and new generations all that we are supposed to transmit to them. We are also debtors in their regard concerning the true values which serve as the foundation for living. In this way, the essential purpose of education ends up unfulfilled and forgotten, namely, that of forming individuals capable of living life to the full and of making their unique contribution to the common good. In various places, the question of authentic education is increasingly being raised as well as the need for those who are truly educators.

The Church, therefore, has an age-old tradition in education, namely pedagogical resources, studies and research, institutions, personnel in a position to provide a significant Church presence in academic institutions and educational activity, in

general. Consequently, a process of discernment in this area would be beneficial not simply to distinguish discussion points about these changes but also to recognize the spiritual resources and future challenges in education which need to be adequately addressed. At the same time, we must be fully aware that the Church's basic task is education in the faith, discipleship and a life of witness and helping people enter into a personal relationship with Christ and the Father."

Note 5 :

LA MENNAIS

Magazine has just published two new issues:
The first issue is on Jean-Marie de la Mennais, published on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of his death.

The second issue focuses on the Mennaisian Family as a call to live fully. As a preparation to the Chapter, one could re-read these two issues.

You can also offer friends, family members and work colleagues, to subscribe to that magazine at the cost of 12 € per annum.

✓ **HOW TO PREPARE THAT CHAPTER?**

Such an important event must be prepared. Each community of Brothers is already involved in that preparation. We invite you to do the same. **The Brothers with whom you share the mission will propose means to that end.** But I myself already invite you personally, as couples or as part of a group, to initiate a deep and prayerful study of what constitutes our basic mission: to educate and to evangelize today.

You will thus set out on a process that will lead you to a conversion of your outlook on children and young people. You will re-discover how one and all are personally loved by God. You will also discover new roads that will help you fearlessly bear witness to that unfathomable Love that satisfies the human heart beyond all expectations. You will hear the Spirit challenge you to speak about Him in all simplicity and love. With Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes, you will love the Church, the family of Jesus' disciples, the people whom the Father has called to Him. You will feel more and more that you are full members of the Mennaisian Family whose mission is precisely to show to young people and children the road leading to hope and to life.

"The little children asked for bread, and there was nobody to share it with them," wrote Fr. de la Mennais (see note 5). If you want, we will go together and bring to them that Bread which gives life, Jesus, our Brother and our Savior.

✓ **A PRAYER**

Lord, help us to set off on our journey towards the coming Chapter in hope.

May this Assembly be a time of deep renewal in our mission of education and of evangelization, so that we may become saints while helping others become saints.

Hold us in your hand, heal us, straighten us, enlighten us, strengthen us.



Brother Yannick Houssay
Rome, May 3, 2011