



***THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
19-31 march 2009***

Nabinoonya – Kisubi

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1

INTRODUCTION

For the first time, thanks to the hospitality of the Brothers of the Ugandan Province, the General Conference was held on the African continent, from March 19 to 31, 2009. A large number of Brothers in the Congregation are already familiar with this vast continent for having spent years of blessings – and, in some cases, very many years – on that continent. The blessings still hold true for all those who carry on the work today. The presence of the major Superiors of the Congregation in Uganda was meant as a token of thanksgiving for the seeds that have borne fruit. Today, witnessing so many Brothers who, in turn, are called upon to be missionaries full of zeal, gives hope as well as strength and dynamism.

We have numerous schools opening their doors to children and young people in both the Province of Uganda and the Vice-

Province of Kenya-Tanzania which is soon to become a Province. Every year, young men join the Brothers and lay people as witnesses to Christ among the little ones and the poor. There are several elderly Brothers who are the memory of what the Brothers have received and which they, in turn, pass on to others.

The fortnight spent in Uganda by the General Council and the major Superiors intended to express their admiration and to convey their encouragement for the pursuance of the well-established missionary work.

The Superiors also wanted to say that all the Brothers, in communion with lay Mennaisians, wish to live their mission and their vocation in a renewed spirit of zeal and of charity grounded in a lively and audacious faith. They wished to reiterate that setting out for a mission and making oneself available to young people on another continent or in another culture gives our charism its dynamism and its beauty.

“Step up your zeal in a spirit of faith.”

Why have chosen this word of our Founder?

This word of John Mary de la Mennais seemed like an invitation to rediscover the inner thrust that he wished to give with such vigour and such faith to his first disciples. The Spirit that moved his heart expects our own heart to open up to his action with even more generosity.

We all know that doubt and weariness spring up here and there. Sometimes, an inner emptiness takes hold of Brothers and keeps them from encountering the risen Lord and answering his call.

To step up our zeal is to allow the love of Christ to reach out to us and make our love for children and young people vibrant and effective. This was John Mary de la Mennais' core message which he repeats to us today.

To step up our zeal is to renew the gift of self unreservedly to the cause for which the Founder wished to have mature men, the cause being the Christian education of youth, that is, inclining the heart of young people to the Gospel, fashioning a world founded on Christ through education, and this, in collaboration with lay people, in the context of the Mennaisian Family.

To step up our zeal in a spirit of faith is to acknowledge that our charism cannot bear fruit without faith in the Spirit who gives it life.

We cannot but listen to these words again and welcome them as a gift from heaven: **“Step up your zeal in a spirit of faith”**. Only then can Hope give rise to life within us. We shall then not worry about the slightest little thing. We shall not be afraid. We shall rejoice in our vocation. We shall bear much fruit, as is the will of our heavenly Father.

Creating the right spirit for the assembly

It was our wish to place ourselves in the Lord's hands, seeking to attend to the Lord's business and that of our Brothers and, together, to find ways to allow them to grow, each in keeping with his own vocation.

We wished to listen to one another, opening our hearts to each other in a spirit of service.

To achieve this, we knew that we first had to listen to the Lord, hence the importance of prayer, our own and that of our

Brothers. Nothing productive can be achieved if the Lord's work is not our priority. We do not have to break new ground, save carry out God's work in keeping with our charism. To that end, each day is a new and stimulating response to his call.

2

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

TWO DAYS OF FORMATION

To start the General Conference in that spirit, we began with a time of recollection and of fraternal sharing on a text¹ that most Superiors had already read but which we wished to deepen: “The Service of Authority and Obedience”.

This instruction allowed us to deepen the mystery of consecrated life which is “called to make the characteristic traits of the virginal, poor and obedient Jesus visible in the Church and in

¹ Text of 2008 from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

the world”. “This search for the face of the Lord and the ways that lead to him leads to the experience of peace,” (n° 1) says the document in its introduction. In order to find this peace, we had to enter our inner selves and ask the following questions: “What does your heart seek? What concerns you? Are you looking for yourself or are you looking for the Lord your God?” (n° 4)

This turned out to be a peak experience of sharing which allowed us to discover the meaning of our mission at the service of our Brothers. In the context of the General Conference which, moreover, took place on the African continent, it was good to read the following words: “One and the same call from God has gathered the members of a community or of an institute together (cf. Col 3:15); one and the same desire of seeking God continues to guide them. ‘Life in community is thus the particular sign, before the Church and society, of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire — notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture — to be obedient to that call. Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique Fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God, despite the human limitations of those who represent him’.” (n° 18)

Such a passage made us realise that, indeed, “holiness and mission pass through the community because the risen Lord makes himself present in it and through it, making it holy and sanctifying the relationships”. (n° 19)

“Within this picture persons in authority promote the growth of fraternal life through the service of listening and dialogue, the creation of a favourable atmosphere for sharing and co-responsibility, the participation of everyone in the concerns of each one, service balanced between the individual and the

community, discernment and the promotion of fraternal obedience.” (n° 20)

COMMUNITY DISCERNEMENT

Following this two-day recollection, a celebration marked the actual start of the General Conference. At the centre of that prayer, and thanks to Brother Paul’s artistic talent and that of his workers, – Brother Paul is in charge of the wood-workshop of the Kisubi community – stood a symbolic representation of the “Dwelling of the meeting tent”.

The General Council then reported on what had been achieved since the last General Chapter. The report focussed on four questions: What is the 2006 General Chapter’s message?² What has been achieved since that Chapter? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the Congregation today? What choices must we make to “reawaken the dynamism of the charism”?

Participants then adopted two working approaches. The first one consisted in sharing the revision of the main orientations of the Chapter previously carried out by the Provinces’ and Vice-Provinces’ councils, following which discussions highlighted challenges that still had to be met and for which relevant responses had to be drawn by the end of the Conference.³ The second approach consisted of workshops by language groups on themes which one of the superiors had presented and which portrayed the situation in his Province or Vice-Province. This led to a sharing of experiences the purpose of which was to assist each Superior in the service of animation that is his.

² See page 15

³ See page 22

These two working methods allowed us to broach all of the Chapter orientations, particularly issues concerning initial and on-going formation, vocational pastoral care, the role of the Word of God and of the *Lectio vitae*, fraternal relations, the Mennaisian evangelising mission, information, solidarity, etc.

Brother Guillermo Davilla and Mr. Michel Tanguy had been invited. They intervened in their respective areas of responsibility, namely, on-going formation and information. Their preliminary work allowed the Assembly to take meaningful strides in these two domains.

A FEW VISITS

Holding the General Conference in Uganda was an ideal opportunity to meet the Brothers of the Province and to get better acquainted with their areas of commitment, even if time and distances did not allow us to see all of them.

However, we were fortunate to meet Brothers and lay persons working in the educational centres of the Province, as well as young people enrolled in these schools and colleges. The web site of the Congregation displayed photos of these visits (www.lamennais.org).

Our visits included:

Kasasa: the noviciate – St. Charles Lwanga Secondary School.

Masaka: St. Henry's College, Kitovu.

Kampala: Mugwanya Preparatory School, Kabojja – Caltec Academy, Makerere – Rubaga Secondary School and Primary School.

Kisubi: Mount St. Teresa Community – the Scholasticate – St. Mary’s College – Savio Junior School – Kisubi Boys’ Primary School – Center of Uganda Martyrs University.

On the Sunday before the Conference, the General Council was privileged to visit St. Jude Primary School in Kakooge.

In all of these visits, we were impressed by the welcome extended to us. The high level of commitment of Brothers and of lay persons at the service of children and young people fostered stronger bonds of communion with them.

Lastly, a pilgrimage to the Ugandan Martyrs Sanctuary in Namugongo, reaffirmed our will to live out our mission with greater love. The faith of the young martyrs challenges us to forge ahead in a total gift of self to the mission, no matter what the cost.

What can be more admirable for a missionary or for a Brother than to awaken in young people, either through witnessing or through teaching, a love of God that can lead to martyrdom itself? Therein lies the call to willingly sacrifice the whole of our life, as John Mary de la Mennais reminds us: “Fulfill your mission with great zeal and love: what an honour, what a glory to have been called to care for the souls whom our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed with his blood!”

3

THE FRUITS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

A REVISION OF THE 2006 GENERAL CHAPTER

Before carrying out the revision of the life of the Congregation and anticipating the orientations for the coming years, we focussed on the mandate given to us by the 2006 General Chapter. We thus became aware that the theme of communion at the service of children and young people was at the very heart of the Chapter's report.

- **Intensifying communion around the charism and the Brother's identity, given the diversity and international character of the Congregation.**

The Chapter invites us to see the world, people and events with the eyes of Christ. This supposes a vibrant experience of God

at the core of our life. Meditation of the Word of God (*Lectio divina*) and revision of life (*Lectio vitae*) allow us to recognise the living and loving presence of God at the heart of our existence. In fact, the charism cannot possibly live without an authentic life of faith which is more than empty words but which pledges the whole of one's life. Each of us is called to undergo such an experience, alone and with others. A continuous tension exists between the individual and the community, a tension which is not an opposition, but which is like the two basic elements of any authentic experience.

In his presentation of the Rule of Life, Brother Gaudeul wrote that the Rule is “the Gospel by which we have to live today”. The Rule of Life is the expression of the charism, it is the Word of God reaching us today. While rereading it, we become only too aware that we fall short of its full implementation. And yet, the path mapped out for us by the Rule of Life must be followed if the charism is to bear fruit.

Our spirituality implies being tuned in to the Spirit who is sending us forth on a mission. Thus, it is at the very heart of the mission, in our relationships with Brothers, lay persons, children, parents and the world that this particular brand of love materialises in action which serves the Lord in his brothers, particularly the little ones and the poor.

Each of us is invited to embark on his own journey over which the superior, the community, the evolving structures of the Congregation, the spiritual guide are necessary mediations if a “communion” of vocations is to be effective.

In keeping with the gift of the Spirit to us today, we give much importance to personal and community discernment. The Chapter conveys to us the same invitation. Have we made much progress in this regard? Discerning the will of God, both personally and in community, presupposes that the community is a

house and a school of communion. If some progress has been achieved where the community project is concerned, has it really changed our life? Has it enhanced our living as consecrated persons at the heart of the world and in accordance with our charism? Have we made the necessary efforts to truly achieve discernment in community? Have we set up discernment procedures for the benefit of our educational endeavours? Are we tuned in to calls from the Church and from the world?

Similarly, it seems to me that the personal project, the purpose of which is to achieve awareness of God's calls in keeping with the Rule of Life, still needs to be adopted by a number of Brothers who do not yet grasp its full significance. We still have a long way to go to understand what the personal project is, what it entails, how to set it up and whom to seek advice from in this respect.

The formation of superiors, which the Chapter stresses as important, is one of the main orientations to which major Superiors must give greater attention. The General Conference ought to provide new momentum in that area.

One facet of communion is its international dimension, a culture which, like the Gospel, is without borders. Solidarity is one way for us of achieving universal brotherhood. We must no doubt forge ahead more boldly in this area, convinced that calls from the Lord necessitate a global, not a solitary, response.

Then, there is the question of formation. The Chapter invites each Brother to embrace the culture of on-going formation which is the same as a culture of "on-going vocation" according to the Superior General of the Salesians. It is a matter of committing oneself personally, daily and creatively to one's vocation.

We cannot do this on our own. We all too often find it difficult listening to God in silent prayer, meditating his Word or reading inspiring books, as well as participating in inspirational and motivational sessions. What have we achieved so far in the

way of formation? We may have drawn up plans, but what have we actually accomplished that has borne fruit? Are our communities inclined to use this approach as a constantly novel response to the call received?

- **At the Service of the Shared Mission**

The second aspect of the main theme of the Chapter concerns more directly the shared mission. The educational mission is at the very heart of our lives and it is carried out as a shared mission with lay persons.

The Chapter invites us to view the educational mission as a matter of urgency which both Brothers and lay persons should engage in jointly. Today, the shared mission is seen as the means by which the charism can live and bear fruit in the Church.

The work accomplished since the Chapter has allowed us to experience how each of us, Brother or lay person, whatever our age, is committed to the mission, not primarily through what we do, but through what we are and live as images of Christ who loves children and young people. In this way, each one of us, according to his own vocation and his own charism, is a manifestation of the Mennaisian charism.

Our mission sanctifies and evangelises. This presupposes persons who have themselves been evangelised in-depth. Mission cannot be divorced from spirituality; otherwise, it is not properly understood and does not achieve the desired outcomes. Have we made headway in our understanding of the Mennaisian spirituality? Above all, has it transformed and rejuvenated our hearts?

All of us, whatever our situation, have been sent. All of our being is on a mission as it is the community as a whole that is “commissioned”. One cannot be a missionary on one’s own. The

community is an image of the missionary Church. It is the missionary Church.

The mission is demanding. It presupposes a serious initial and on-going formation supported by a solid spiritual experience. It can be said to be authentic only if the Good News is preached to the poor. It requires an in-depth appreciation for Mennaisian education. It demands discernment and audacity to be where the Spirit wants us to be.

The mission is a shared mission. The school is a model of communion, it is a school of communion and it imparts an education that fosters communion. Brothers commit themselves joyfully to this form of education as a new way to carry out their vocation. Each community endeavours to be ferment of unity and source of communion as it animates the educational community and inspires it.

Lay persons are invited to embark on the same mission, each according to his/her convictions and vocation. Brothers will help them endorse the Mennaisian mission without pressurising them or in any way conditioning their willing, progressive and free adherence to it.

To further help matters along, the Chapter has thought it best to clarify the status of “Associate members”. The definition of that status must now be interpreted in the context of the text of reference of the Mennaisian Family.

Today, vocational pastoral care falls within the framework of the Mennaisian Family. Even if it was dealt with separately by the Chapter, vocational pastoral care falls within the scope of the shared mission. We are members of a Church-communion where all vocations come together and where both Brothers and lay persons are needed. The Chapter has invited us to renew our outlook and our practices in this regard. What have we achieved?

We must look into this matter a little further, not to make us feel guilty, but to seek God's way for today in that area.

The Chapter has also broached the important question of initial and on-going formation in the context of Church-communion and of the Mennaisian Family. In spite of a certain progress, much remains to be done. Brothers in charge of formation in our novitiates and scholaticates have to make theirs this dimension of the shared mission which testifies to our communion. Are communities open to the initiatives proposed by the General Council and the Provinces in this area?

The Chapter has also asked the General Council to develop a framework for the shared mission so that Provinces may propose programmes of formation and adopt a common culture for the Congregation. Measures were taken in this regard which have allowed one and all to express themselves. This led to the drafting of a text of reference for the Mennaisian Family. It is up to us now to propose and adopt means that will be conducive to full implementation.

Lastly, the Chapter has introduced in the Directory a text which indicates the Congregation's willingness to respond to what has been discerned as a call from the Church and from God. Through this text, the Church herself asks us to forge ahead on the road of the shared mission in bringing the Good News to the youth through education.

- **A Renewed Vocational Pastoral Care Programme**

In a special text, the Chapter presents the vocational pastoral care programme as a process of formation which extends from a first encounter to the entrance to the postulate. It is a progressive, developmental process.

It is a question of young people experimenting our way of life, making it theirs and becoming aware of its inner secret through

specific educational commitments, sharing community living, etc. They need accompanying adults who can propose to them growth experiences adapted to their age.

This requires that Brothers be close to young people. It is the responsibility of each Province to develop a vocational pastoral care programme that concerns all the communities and the whole of the community.

In this regard, both Brothers and lay persons will attempt to break new ground.

Prayer for vocations is not optional. It is an integral part of any true vocational pastoral care programme which by nature is spiritual. It is inspired by the Spirit or it will not last.

ORIENTATIOS FOR THE COMING YEARS

What follows is not meant as an alternative to the 2006 Chapter's orientations. Rather, it is the outcome of the Brothers' sharing and discernment during the General Conference following a survey of the text of the Chapter and the assessment of its implementation in the Congregation over the past three years.

Thus, what has been retained here are the most important aspects which may help sustain our pursuit of community commitments in fidelity to the General Chapter.

The ways and means of carrying out an action plan have not all been spelled out. It is up to the General Council in the first place, and then up to the major Superiors, to take them up so that at every level of the Congregation the work of the Spirit may bear fruit for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

"Step up your zeal in a spirit of faith."

1. Initial Formation

The participants to the General Conference expressed the wish that the efforts and the initiatives concerning initial formation be better coordinated and strengthened. This concerns four areas:

- A comprehensive reflection on the whole of the initial formation process, from the entrance to the postulate to the perpetual profession in line with the orientations of the Ratio Institutionis.
- A consolidation of the spiritual formation in keeping with the charism specific to the Congregation, a necessary condition for young Brothers to get a good start in religious life.
- A strengthening of the feeling of belonging to the Congregation. Such is the purpose of the international Mennaisian session proposed to all Brothers before their perpetual profession.
- A sustained effort toward the formation of the persons in charge of formation.

2. On-Going Formation

Emphasis has been placed on a deepening of the spiritual life which takes into account the various stages of life. Growth in the Spirit is essential to consecrated life. This presupposes some assistance, a form of accompaniment and a sustained process of formation. In this area, Superiors must give Brothers as well as lay persons who wish to live by the Mennaisian charism, the necessary assistance.

Lectio divina, Lectio vitae and the personal life project are various means by which spiritual and apostolic life may thrive.

Ways must be found for their implementation to reach full maturity, but for

The animation team for on-going formation which was created this year has received the mandate to provide Brothers and lay persons with some of the means to help them keep the course as regards on-going formation. However, the animation team is not responsible for everything that deals with on-going formation. This remains the prime responsibility of Superiors.

For the next three years, the animation team will take charge of the development and of the follow-up of the yearly theme for the whole of the Congregation. Its duties will also include the organisation and the running of an annual one-month formation session in Ploërmel for Brothers between 35 and 50 years of age. It will also provide assistance to Provinces and Vice-Provinces concerning the formation of lay persons and Brothers in the context of the Mennaisian Family, as well as regarding the formation of local superiors.

The formation team will have the support of an international Commission for on-going formation made up of Brothers who are in charge of formation in their Province and, if possible, of some lay persons. The mandate of the Commission will entail gathering formation didactic material, making proposals at the level of the Congregation, planning yearly themes together with their pedagogical back-up material and, more generally, taking into consideration all that has to do with on-going formation.

The *Études Mennaisiennes* will also become an instrument of on-going formation. Thanks to the very numerous issues published under the direction of Brother Philippe Friot, and before him, Brother Paul Cueff, we have a wealth of information about the history of the origins of the Congregation. It is our wish, henceforth, under the guidance of Brother Josu Olabarrieta, for the periodical to become a medium for Brothers and lay persons to

enhance the meaning of the charism for today. The work is about to get underway. Our thanks go to Brother Josu and to those working with him for providing this very valuable service to us.

3. The Mennaisian Family

Since 2007, we have worked at drafting a “Framework for the Shared M

Following a survey among lay persons and Brothers and an international Assembly that can be said to have been a founding event in Ploërmel, in August 2008, the document “The Mennaisian Family, a text of reference” was born. The document should now make it possible for Brothers and lay persons throughout the Congregation, while making allowances for individual sectors’ circumstances, to work at the making of this large new Family.

Now that the text has been finalised, we can forge ahead with the setting up of the Mennaisian Family. In a spirit of communion and under the guidance of Superiors and their councils, Provinces and Vice-Provinces will henceforth call and accompany those seeking assistance, propose formations and, when the time comes, establish structures that foster life and communion.

Other major stages in the journey will certainly follow. For the time being, however, the importance thing is to set off and discern the new steps that the Lord is inviting us to take. We must all hear this call to openness, to more open relationships with those who are different from us, to break out of our selves and to trust God’s inspiration. This is the way to reach out to young people, to lay persons and, when all is said and done, to God.

4. Commitment to the Evangelising Mission through Education:

Today, the goal of the Congregation is the same as it was at the time of our founders, namely, respond to the urgent call of the mission to evangelise and educate children and young people.

As underscored in Letter n° 1 to the Mennaisian Family, lay persons and Brothers of the Mennaisian Family whose mission extends to all continents, are all called upon to bring the Good News to young people: “You are loved. The world needs you.”

“We must proclaim this message to all, and most especially to the children and to the youth who are unhappy because of all the riches that snuff out their will to live; to those who suffer from not being loved and who, unconsciously or through fear, allow themselves to be exploited by various financial interests; to those who lose hope in the world, or who are victims of conflicts beyond their control. All those young people are waiting for us.”⁴

Shouldn't this mission be of prime concern today? The Church unceasingly repeats it and what is happening in the world proves it. This is why the Brothers of the General Conference forcefully called upon all members of the Mennaisian Family to step up their zeal in the accomplishment of that mission.

Together, we must gaze upon the world of young people and share with them the only wealth that we have: the loving presence of Jesus who saves them and fills their heart with the fire of his love. The education we give them must allow them to be, in turn, sources of light in the world. We must go to the youth with love, proposing to them the kind of education that makes them stand tall and opens before them broad horizons of Hope.

The Word of God challenges us today. It invites us to break out of our closed selves and make common cause with the youth for theirs is also God's cause. The Spirit invites us to the good

⁴ Letter n° 1 (2009) to the Mennaisian Family

fight in peace, to brave the future with the conviction that the Kingdom of God is at hand and that the victory of love is upon us.

5. Vocational Promotion

On a number of occasions, the members of the General Conference have brought up the question of vocations. Seeing young Brothers in Uganda has given rise to a feeling of thanksgiving and of happiness as well as to a strong wish for Provinces and Vice-Provinces to open wide their doors to young people.

We must bridge the gap that keeps us away from young people. At the heart of the Mennaisian Family, we must witness with enthusiasm to the beauty and the meaningfulness of the Mennaisian Brother's way of life. What keeps us from doing so? Why are we so diffident? Are we afraid? Cannot our way of life move young people?

Let us look around us. Let us follow the example of other Congregations. Let us work with them. What initiatives can we take to use all the resources at our disposal, such as modern technologies? If this seems impossible for us, nothing is impossible to God and to whosoever puts his full trust in him.

We placed great emphasis on the importance of prayer for vocations. We said it was essential since vocation has to do with a call from God. We also said that we had to open the heart of young people to the action of God, to open them to his Word, to enable them to pray and to be moved by him. If we ourselves have been moved by Christ, why can't they also be moved by him?

Such is the fight that calls for all of our energy and all of our faith. Victory belongs to those who are willing to go against the current. Shall we be numbered among those?

6. A Culture of the Congregation

The participants to the General Conference were impressed by the importance given to the theme of communion by the General Chapter. Even if we had not previously been aware of this so clearly, yet we knew that we are called to be a house and a school of communion in the Church-communion.

We became conscious that the theme of communion should be the Hope on which to build our future. How often did Father de la Mennais remind his Brothers of this! The Mennaisian Family is there to testify to this. We are called upon to build a home in which all will feel welcome, expected, desired and loved.

In order to do this, we must share more and more, opening ourselves to other Brothers and to lay people who live according to the same charism on other continents and nearby. What binds us together is infinitely stronger than what separates us.

Our experience of communion during the General Conference showed us that united we are strong. This “culture of the Congregation” should allow us, in the years to come, to better grasp certain calls of the times.

In fact, is it not of the utmost importance that we take up such challenges as the missionary thrust, the pastoral work of promoting vocations, the Mennaisian Family, together rather than singly? Should we not make wider the place of our tent, lend a helping hand to the weakest and leave our securities behind so as to share our wealth with those in need?

This “culture of the Congregation” is but another way of speaking about solidarity or about fraternity. It vouches for our being concerned with the mission of education and with the ad extra missions even when age forces us into retirement. It reminds us that they too are associated to the mission, who through their

silent prayer or their sufferings, can provide support to those who are fortunate enough to be among children still.

Nothing is more beautiful and more profitable for the world than men who, although different from one another through temperament, culture or origin, feel strongly united by the charisma that creates in them such love for young people!

7. Solidarity

The sign that we live in communion with each other is our ability to stand by our Brothers in need. It is all too easy to be like the Levite or the priest when faced with the wounded foreigner by the side of the road. We can muster untold excuses to justify doing nothing.

Of course, we need not limit solidarity to economic assistance, although we do have to consider helping financially. In the Congregation, some sectors are in need while others still have the means to help, but for how long?

We have therefore decided to implement a more structured form of solidarity that looks to the future. This will not prevent already well-established networks to continue operating or to set up similar networks. This form of solidarity should make it possible for all to benefit, for some time still, from the support of their Brothers in a fair and judicious way.

It is our conviction, though, that solidarity does apply first and foremost among Brothers of the same community and of the same Province. The bursars of the Congregation who met in Kisubi at the beginning of April shared that conviction. It is of the utmost importance that all Brothers abide by the demands of the vow of poverty which consist in keeping nothing for themselves and in handing over everything (salary, indemnities and all that they may receive) to the community through their superior. Without this basic commitment of the vows made before the Church and before

God, there can be no thought of true solidarity among the Brothers of the same Congregation.

The solidarity fund concerns all the Brothers. It is a reminder to all to practice poverty and detachment responsibly. It is a more systematic way of providing fraternal assistance to those among us who are most in need. Basically, the fund supports the educational mission of the Congregation, particularly where the needs are the greatest.

Let it be said, however, that this solidarity fund aims at providing assistance to the Brothers and to the communities, and not to the educational endeavours themselves. The NGO's of the Congregation and other organisations or associations will continue their very valuable contributions to the Congregation's undertakings.

8. Information

Recent initiatives have been taken to improve the circulation of information at the level of the Congregation, the purpose of which is to strengthen communion among Brothers and lay persons through sharing their enthusiasm at the service of children and young people.

The La Mennais Magazine fosters such dynamism. The web site is also meant to evolve as a tool, among others, to help live the Mennaisian educational mission in a spirit of communion.

It was also the General Conference's wish that Mr. Michel Tanguy, information director, receive the assistance of an international Council for information. This Council should come into being in the course of this year and should live up to the expectations of one and all in the field of communication and information.

9. The 150th Anniversary of the Death of J. M. de la Mennais

One of the first tasks of the international Council for information, together with the General Council, will consist in preparing relevant material for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of John Mary de la Mennais.

The year 2010-2011 will be important, not only by reason of the anniversary which we shall celebrate, but equally for the missionary dimension it will receive. A word of John Mary de la Mennais will again send us forth to the youth, a word which he wrote to his Brothers a few days before he passed away and shortly after he had sent some to the last mission he founded, Tahiti: “Sow generously.”

The official opening of that year will take place at the mother-house in Ploërmel on November 26, 2010. Its symbolic closing will take place on June 24, 2011, at Larantuka (Florès, Indonesia), one of our last missionary foundations.

It is hoped that each Province and Vice-Province will seize the occasion to revive its missionary fervour. We rely on the filial love and the apostolic zeal of the entire Mennaisian Family.

10. Accompaniment of Superiors

I conclude with what might be the most important point. We all know that on our own we can do very little but that together we can move mountains.

We have emphasised the importance of spiritual accompaniment for both Brothers and lay persons. Even if this seems rather difficult, we should try to give everyone the possibility of meeting a person who can provide this kind of assistance.

But we also wish to stress the importance of accompanying those who have received the service of authority as a mandate, be it at the level of communities or at the level of Provinces and Vice-Provinces.

For persons to fulfill that service which no one, at whatever level, feels especially prepared for, brotherly support is the most precious gift one may give a superior. We must look for new means to help local as well as major Superiors.

Although this circular cannot possibly go into the necessary practical ways and means, the fact must be underscored since it is one area on which the members of the General Conference did particularly insist.

4

A MESSAGE TO THE BROTHERS

How can I conclude this circular without allowing the participants themselves to speak in a more direct way other than through a mere account?

You will, of course, find some written comments on the web site of the Congregation. Here, however, I wish to pass on comments that have been made during our last meeting. Each was invited to express thoughts as part of a message addressed to the Brothers. Here are some heartfelt observations from the Superiors at the Conference. These remarks are tinged with the spontaneity and the simplicity of Brothers sharing among themselves. They

also reflect a profound desire to “step up our zeal” in a new thrust of faith and of love for the youth.

“The Conference allowed us to fraternise while listening to each other’s views. We left reenergised. It was truly a time of grace.”

“Let’s not forget that on-going formation is a daily affair. It is our way of responding, everyday, to an ever renewed call.”

“We were fortunate to get to know a young Province full of promise. We were granted the privilege to touch the fruits of the seeds sown by our missionary Brothers.”

“We must carry on listening to one another and to trust each other so as to face the future with assurance.”

“We invite one and all to hope. We do not have very many new things to share, but we rely on the gift received from God: our charism. We must forge ahead with hope and joy.”

“The charism is a gift from God passed on through our founders. The charism is not for us to keep. It is meant for the youth. It must be kept alive by way of a vibrant spiritual life renewed through daily commitment.”

“Let’s set off on the road of the Mennaisian Family through formation, communion, structures that foster life, calls from the youth and lay people. We invite Provinces to recreate and celebrate what the August 2008 Ploërmel Assembly experienced.”

I only wish to add to these messages that if the Congregation is in God’s hands, nevertheless, he entrusts it to us. The fruits of the charism rest entirely with him, but through his grace, we are also answerable to ourselves for its fruition.

While reviewing the orientations that have been recorded in this circular, we may feel that there is nothing new and that, as a result, nothing will really change. This is the attitude of one who

sits by the wayside and who is not really concerned with what is unfolding before his very eyes. “We made music for you, but you did not take part in the dance!” (Luke 7, 32) I am certain no Brother shares this attitude. On the contrary, all wish to make their contribution to the vitality of our large Family. Sharing with Brothers during my visits of the Congregation only confirmed this.

Brothers, may I encourage you with all my heart to give the best of yourselves. See, the sun is rising. The Spirit of God wants to transform us and make us bear fruit on our barren hillsides. He who is full of kindness takes us by the hand and leads us. The Lord comforts those whom he has chosen, “to the afflicted, He shows his mercy” (Isaiah 49, 13).

The Lord counts on everyone’s participation to give the Congregation its new youthfulness. Thanks to the vitality of so many lay persons of the Mennaisian Family and of so many Brothers, young and old, the charism will bear fruits of justice and love in favour of so very many children and young people throughout the world.

“Glory be to God who has inspired this resolution to you and who will give you the strength to keep it! Peace be with you! You belong to this race of men of goodwill to whom the angels announced and promised peace when Jesus our Saviour came into this world and gave to all the example of poverty, of humility and of total self-denial. Peace be with you! Peace in your heart whose love, feelings and desires belong to God alone!”⁵

Brothers, let us decide to contemplate tirelessly the light of the beloved Son of the Father. Only then can we grow in love, inner dynamism and holiness. We will then see more clearly the new “projects” which the Lord invites us, both Brothers and lay people, to launch. While avoiding the pitfalls of the status quo and of

⁵ John Mary de la Mennais to Brothers who are about to take their vows, S 2375.

personal security at all costs, we will not shy away from taking the “generous and demanding” decisions which the Spirit inspires us.

Brother Yannick Houssay, S.G.

May 31st, 2009, on the solemnity of Pentecost