

**“Make wide the place
of your tent.”**

(Isaiah 54, 2)

Letter n° 2

to the Mennaisian Family

Rome

April 2009

The Brothers of the General Council, together with the Provincials and Vice-Provincials of the Congregation (**Note 1**), have met in Uganda (Kisubi) for the General Conference which was held from the 18th to the 31st March, 2009. The purpose of that meeting was to assess the life of the Congregation and the dynamism of our response to the calls of the Spirit since the last General Chapter, and to look ahead to the three coming years.

The occasion was also a great privilege to discover for ourselves the youngest Province of the Congregation (**Note 2**) and the schools that the Brothers have established there.

The reference document on the Mennaisian Family (**Note 3**) which the Brothers of the General Conference – and thereafter the General Council – have adopted testifies to a firm step taken with trust and boundless faith. This is why, following the conference, I have decided to write, for a second time, to the Brothers and lay persons of the “Mennaisian Family”.

WELCOMING THE GIFT OF GOD ■

During the General Conference, we have discerned a strong invitation from the Lord to welcome each other with all our differences, to show openness to others, to build, with his help, the “tent” of the Lord”, the abode of God among us, and to see communion and unity as the signs and conditions of the fecundity of our commitment to the youth and the Church.

Whoever gives without measure knows happiness and peace. Whoever takes refuge in self-assuredness, as if to defend a castle under siege, forsakes happiness and peace for narrow self-interest.

Note 1:

The General Conference meets to assess on-going developments in the Congregation and to seek ways to ever better answer the calls of God and of the Church. A more complete document will be published in the next few months to make known the key orientations for the coming years that have held the participants’ attention at the conference.

Note 2:

On August 4, 1926, four Canadian Brothers arrived in Entebbe after having spent one year in England to improve their English language skills. This marked the establishment of the Brothers of Christian Instruction in Uganda. Currently, Ugandan Brothers number 142. They run a few primary schools and some ten secondary / higher schools as well as a branch of the Catholic University of Nkozi for the training of teachers.

Note 3:
The document of reference which has been under consideration since 2007 has now been finalised. This long-awaited document should allow the Mennaisian family to give itself a structure and to set up formation programmes. It will give renewed vigour to everything that has developed in the Congregation over the years in the field of shared mission.

The Mennaisian charism is a gift received and a gift offered. It is in each of us, not as a treasure that we would wish to keep for ourselves, but as a seedling that longs to blossom and develop into fruits of peace in the hearts of young people.

We are called upon to welcome this gift of God, to give free rein to the love that comes with it and to give what we have received to young people, to the Brothers and to lay people who share with us the same happiness of being in the likeness of Jesus in the midst of children. Let us be open to God's unexpected visitations. Let us be open to the grace which he gives without measure to those who love him with all their heart, with all their strength and with all their mind. Leaving behind our fears and our hesitations, while remaining faithful to the call of the Spirit, makes for freedom and allows the gift of God to spring forth.

MAKING FRUITFUL GOD'S WORK

Note 4:
"Continuing formation, whether in Institutes of apostolic or contemplative life, is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration," says *Vita Consecrata*.
There must be readiness on the part of the religious "to let themselves be formed every day of their lives. [...] At no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness; just as there is no age at which a person has completely achieved maturity" (*Vita Consecrata*, n° 69).

The Mennaisian family is a large family. So that it may bear fruit, we must foster a common culture, a culture of brotherhood in the image of the beloved Son of the Father. This presupposes that we are open to each other, seeking to recognise the gifts that God has given each of us for the good of the whole body.

Fruits will grow to the same extent that mutual trust overcomes distrust, that fraternity prevails over division, that seeking the glory of God triumphs over self-seeking, and that the greater good of young people rises above self-interest.

Building up the body necessitates personal and community holiness. Fraternal love, at times difficult to achieve in daily circumstances, makes our mission fruitful. Brotherly love is not optional. It is the very foundation of our apostolic effectiveness.

The Brothers of the General Conference have wished that great care be given to accompanying the local superiors, as well as communities of Brothers and groups or fraternities of lay people, who share the same charism. Similarly, they have seen the building up of the Mennaisian family as a journey full of promise at the heart of the Church in which all vocations are at one with each other.

ANSWERING THE CALL TO ONE'S VOCATION ■

Whoever listens to the Word of God and whoever seeks to do God's will instead of his/her own feels the need for on-going formation and accepts to be on the move. "Our vocation is on-going". This is how the Superior General of the Salesians referred to continuing formation (Note 4). What is important, beyond words, is the attitude of a heart that never settles for the very least since the Lord's call is a work in progress. Answering the call as lay or religious Mennaisians is setting out on a journey daily, it is being born again everyday and always seeking to imitate Christ honestly, sincerely, joyously and selflessly and, in the last analysis, seeking at all times "the Kingdom of God and its justice" (Mt 6, 33).

This is why spiritual life requires all of our attention. It "*must have first place in the programme of families of consecrated life,*" says *Vita consecrata* which affirms that "*it is precisely the spiritual quality of the consecrated life which can inspire the men and women of our day*" (*Vita consecrata* n° 93). It must also have first place in the formation proposed to lay persons who wish to belong to the Mennaisian family.

The Brothers of the General Conference also considered that importance should be given to helping Brothers and lay persons better understand where they stand in their relationship with the Lord, what he accomplishes in them and how the "inner man" may be strengthened (Note 5).

They also wished to stress the importance of initial formation. Real efforts should be sustained to help accompanying adults train young people to listen to the inner voice of the Lord. It may also be fitting to offer lay persons who so wish similar training adapted to their particular vocation (Note 6).

Note 5:

The expression « inner man » indicates the place where Christ dwells, that place of personal encounter with God where we come to know the love of Christ. This is not intellectual and abstract knowledge, but knowledge enlightened by faith which enables us to receive, as in clay vessels, "the fullness of God". He alone can do in us "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Eph 3, 20 and Circular n° 302, p. 9)

Note 6:

It may be relevant, here, to reread what the *Ratio* tells us regarding the aim of formation: "The primary objective of the formation process is the promotion of a Brother's growth in union with Christ and configuration to him, through a course of action which allows him to gradually identify with the attitude of Christ towards his Father, in keeping with the Mennaisian charism which is his distinctive feature..." (n° 4). By adapting it, the formation process should be the same for lay Mennaisians

Note 7:

On December 26, 2010, the Congregation will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the death of John Mary de la Mennais. We shall give this event a strong missionary flavour. On November 26, 2010, a new “Espace Jean-Marie de la Mennais” will be inaugurated in Ploërmel. On June 24, 2011, the General Council will symbolically close that commemorative year in Indonesia, the last “mission” founded by the Congregation in the year 2000.

“Sow abundantly,” John Mary de la Mennais told his Brothers a few days before he died. In 2010, we shall celebrate the 150th anniversary of his death (Note 7) as well as of the sending off of the first Brothers to Tahiti, the last “mission” founded by our founder. Let these words ring like the call to a renewed apostolic and missionary thrust. Sowing abundantly the Good News to all those who are waiting for this message of love and hope, carrying the Gospel message of peace in spite of contrary winds, such will be the meaning of the anniversary which the Mennaisian family will commemorate from November 26, 2010, to June 24, 2011.

This event will give us the occasion to put ourselves back on the road with hearts inflamed by the fire of the Spirit: Passion for young people; Passion for our Brothers; Passion for those who share the mission with us; Passion for God who is madly in love with us (Note 8). The celebration will also resound as a call to young people to become in turn sowers of hope.

Note 8:

The General Conference has stressed the importance of stepping up our zeal for the evangelising and the educational mission. In the context of the Mennaisian family, we, both Brothers and lay persons, should turn our eyes towards the youth, listen to what the Church expects of us, be of one mind and take joint steps in the all-important service of the human and Christian formation of children and of young people through full commitment in the areas of education and of teaching.

THE SPIRIT OF PENTECOST ■

The strong breath of the Spirit is raring to fan flames of love and renewed zeal in our communities and educational centres so that children and young people may hear the Word that saves and raises them up. What Peter proclaimed after Pentecost day quoting the prophet Joel, we can hear for ourselves today. Yes, “listen to these words”: “*And it will come about, in the last days, says God, that I will send out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will be prophets, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams: And on my men-servants and my women-servants I will send my Spirit, and they will be prophets*” (Ac 2, 17-18).

Let us set out joyfully. Let us live truthfully. Let our faith be active and effective. Let us act upon what John Mary de la Mennais urges us to do today: “*Step up your zeal in a spirit of faith.*” How great will our joy then be when we witness the Lord’s work in the hearts of young people and of children!

Brother Yannick Houssay, s.g.



Rome, April 12, 2009
Feast of the Resurrection of Christ