



# **28<sup>th</sup> General Chapter 2024**

## **Servants of Hope**

**Brother Hervé Zamor, Superior General**

**BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION**

**March 2023**

**Circular 319**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Brothers,

The General Chapter of 2024 – will be the 28th General Chapter since the professed Brothers who gathered in Ploërmel on August 4, 1869, decided to endow the Institute with this structure of discernment and government. – It will be held at the Casa Divin Maestro, in Ariccia, in the hills overlooking Castel Gandolfo (Italy), from March 26 to April 24, 2024. This is a powerful moment for our Congregation and concerns all of us, Brothers and Lay people of the Mennaisian Family, heirs to this beautiful synodal experience. Each one of us will have to make a contribution so that this Chapter celebration reflects both the rich diversity of our cultures and the profound fraternity that gathers us around our Founders Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes, in the footsteps of Christ.

The theme chosen for the preparation of the Chapter is: "**Servants of Hope**" and the biblical icon, the first sign of Jesus at Cana (Jn 2, 1-11). Why these two choices?

The fruit of the discernment of the major Superiors gathered in Rome for a General Conference from September 26 to October 4, 2022, this text of the evangelist John resonated in us at the end of the review of the Chapters of the Provinces and Districts and of the last General Chapter. We welcomed it as a call to a new beginning, to a true conversion. Only the Word of God, listened to, welcomed and lived, following the example of Mary, can change our water into new wine. In the context of the health, economic and ecological crises and the worrying armed conflicts that shake

our world, on the one hand, and in the face of the great fragility and aging of our Institute, on the other, the first sign of Jesus at Cana reminds us that the Lord is not indifferent to our cries of distress. On the contrary, he is ready to answer them if we cry out to him with faith, hope and perseverance.

**"Servants of Hope"**! Several reasons led me to choose this theme. It is a continuation of this year's theme: *"Witnessing to Hope"*. It will also be a good preparation for the jubilee of 2025 decided by the Pope, the theme of which is *"Pilgrims of Hope"*. In analyzing the reality of today's world, Cardinal Pietro Parolin emphasizes the urgency of promoting the value of trust in the future: *"The events of recent years, of recent months, seem to oblige the Church to fix her gaze on the theological virtue of hope (...) and hope calls each of us to be responsible builders of a better world."*<sup>1</sup> This is an urgent service that today's world profoundly needs. Pope Francis extends the same invitation to us when he asks us to *"keep alive the flame of hope that has been given to us, and to do everything possible so that each of us may find the strength and certainty to look to the future with an open mind, a trusting heart and a clear-sighted intelligence."*<sup>2</sup>

In the story of the wedding at Cana, John strongly emphasizes the dimensions of service and of hope. Indeed, through Mary's intercession: *"They have no more wine"* (Jn 2:3) and her recommendation: *"Whatever he tells you, do it"*, she fulfills her true mission: servant of hope at the heart of the Church. Thus, by filling the jars with water at Jesus' command, the servants of the New Covenant participate actively in his ministry of service and education to hope.

In fact, by obeying Jesus, our Hope (1 Tim 1:1), and by training ourselves to respond to Mary's invitation after the example of the servants of Cana, we educate ourselves to the values of participation, collaboration, fraternity, communion,

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<sup>1</sup> Mgr Pietro Parolin, Presentation of the theme of the Jubilee, June 28, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to Mgr Rino Fisichella, February 11, 2022.

mission and synodality. Is this not the best pedagogy to impregnate ourselves with the great orientations of the next Synod? This is the path to take so that our water may be changed into good wine, so that the wine of the New Covenant no longer runs out. This is our hope! This is our commitment!

The theme "**Servants of Hope**" is in line with and gives meaning to what our Congregation is currently experiencing. At the heart of our frailties, the first sign of Jesus at Cana shows us what we can expect from Mary, our Mother: strength in our struggles, consolation in our sorrows, hope in our failures and joy in our victories. The humble servant of Nazareth teaches us fidelity to Christ, the only Rule for being disciples of the Master. She teaches us the efficacy of the prayer of intercession which is summed up in these few words: "*They have no more wine*". It makes us desire the presence of Jesus, who alone can transform the water in our jars into "*good wine*" for our greatest joy.

Cana is the hour of Jesus and Mary. It is therefore the God-given time of the Church and of our Institute! This is the meaning of the decision we have taken to update our Rule of Life. We want Jesus to change the water in our jars into good wine. In doing so, we commit ourselves to be servants of a New Covenant sealed by a new Rule of Life. A new path of conversion! Renewed fidelity! A new wedding! New wine, new wineskins!

Traveling with the Gospel of the wedding feast of Cana will be a good preparation for the renewal of the consecration of the Institute to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which will take place towards the end of our Chapter. Looking forward to the General Chapter of 2024, the year of the Bicentenary of our Mother House in Ploërmel, listening to each other, attentive to the signs of the Spirit, we are invited to set out with confidence, praying and imitating Mary, Mother of Hope. Thus, we will be "**Servants of Hope**".

This circular letter, after having presented the composition of the General Chapter and the procedure for the election of delegates, proposes to the entire Mennaisian

Family a process of preparation that will call upon the creativity and sense of initiative of each Brother and Lay Mennaisian, of each community and fraternity. May this time, which separates us from our General Chapter, be the favorable moment, the *kairos*, that will let the Holy Spirit forge in us a truly synodal<sup>3</sup> mentality. May he allow us to enter with courage and freedom of heart into this process of conversion without which the permanent reform that our Congregation constantly needs as a human and earthly institution will not be possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Synod of 2023, Preparatory Document – For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission, n°9

## Methodology for reading and working with the Circular

<p>This circular letter has a double purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to organize the elections of delegates to the 2024 General Chapter</li> <li>• to involve the entire Mennaisian Family (Brothers and Lay people) in its preparation based on the theme: "<b>Servants of Hope</b>".</li> </ul>		
Dates	Activities	Pages
March – May 2023	Personal or community reading of the entire circular. This will allow everyone to fully understand the proposed approach.	1-44
May– July 2023	Organization of the elections of the Capitulants	9-18
September 2023 – March 2024	Participation of communities of Brothers and of Mennaisian Fraternities on the journey to the General Chapter based on the theme.	19-39
<p>The participation of Brothers and Lay people in the preparation of the 2024 General Chapter will take place over seven months, from September 2023 to March 2024. Here, the number 7 has a symbolic value in our journey. Following the example of the Apostles who, after the resurrection of Jesus, prepared for seven weeks prior to Pentecost, let us journey with Mary towards our General Chapter during seven months in synodal mode, listening to each other and all listening to the Holy Spirit. <i>"Let us go to Jesus: he is the one who baptizes in the Spirit"</i> (S I, 99). Starting from the Gospel of the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2, 1-11), a seven-step journey is proposed:</p>		
September 2023	1- Communing with Mary's compassion	
October 2023	2- Daring to call upon the hour of Jesus	
November 2023	3- Listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord	
December 2023	4- Filling up the jars	
January 2024	5- Drawing and serving the wine	
February 2024	6- Savouring the new wine	
March 2024	7- Welcoming the Sign	

**Local community:**

In the circular, at the end of each step, questions are suggested for discussion in communities and in Mennaisian fraternities. Here is a proposal for animation:

- 1- The Superior sets a day, if possible, in the first week of the month, for sharing. Before the chosen date, the participants read the contents of the step and answer the questions.
- 2- On the appointed day, the community or fraternity gathers and invokes the Holy Spirit with a song or an appropriate prayer. Then they listen to the Gospel of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11).
- 3- After a time of silence, each person shares freely from the questions (one question at a time). A designated secretary takes notes.
- 4- After this time of mutual listening, the secretary rereads the essence of what has been shared. The community or fraternity discerns and retains an attitude, a request, an effort... The chosen point is posted in the oratory and/or in the community room. It will be the community's prayer intention and commitment to live for the month. It is important to provide for that purpose a space that can contain the seven points that will represent the preparation of the General Chapter since the community will add one element each month.
- 5- The meeting concludes with the prayer of preparation for the 28th General Chapter.
- 6- The secretary gives the synthesis to the Superior of the community who sends it to the major Superior without delay.

<b>Province</b> <b>District</b>	The major Superior compiles the contributions of his communities and sends them to the <b>General Secretariat</b> according to the following schedule:		
Steps 1-2	End October 2023	Steps 5-6	End February 2024
Steps 3-4	End December 2023	Step 7	March 15, 2024

These inputs from all the communities of the Congregation will contribute to the elaboration of the "*Instrumentum Laboris*" of the General Chapter: "**Servants of Hope**".



# I

## COMPOSITION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

### **Members by right (C 157)**

The members by right of the General Chapter are

- The Superior General and the Brothers Assistant
- The former Superior General
- The major Superiors (Provincials and Visitors).

### **The elected members (D 168)**

The elected members must be perpetually professed. Their number is equal to at least  $3/2$  of that of the members by right.

### **Members who do not have the right to vote (D 168)**

The Brothers Secretary General, Treasurer General and Procurator to the Holy See take part in the work of the Chapter but without the right to vote in the General Assembly.

### **The number of members of the Chapter**

The Chapter must have at least 40 members with voting rights (*decision of the General Chapter of 2000*). Among these 40 members are the 4 members of the General Council and the former Superior General. This leaves at least 35 Brothers to be distributed among the administrative units. In this case, the **Chapter quantum**, that is, the number of Brothers from which the number of delegates per administrative unit is determined, is calculated by dividing the total number of professed Brothers by 35.

Taking this decision into account, for the General Chapter of 2024, **the quantum is set at 20.**

According to the Chapter Book (no. 8), one year before the day set for the opening of the Chapter, the General Council, after verifying the list of all the professed Brothers, determines the number of delegates to be elected in each electoral constituency.

### **The electoral constituencies**

Every administrative unit (Province or District) which has the number of professed members entitling it to at least one elected delegate, even if this is only attributed to it by the rule of the largest remainders, forms an electoral constituency.

For those administrative units whose numbers do not reach half of the quantum, the Superior General and his Council will decide on the measures to be taken, after consultation with the major Superiors (*Chapter Decision of 2000*). At present, the delegation of Italy and the District of Saint-Pierre Chanel (Tahiti - Marquesas) are concerned.

### **Some particular points**

- 1- Electoral constituency: In order to allow each Brother to participate in the choice of Capitulants, the Province of St. John the Baptist and the Delegation of San Pietro (Italy) form the same electoral constituency.
- 2- The Provinces of St. John the Baptist and St. Michael the Archangel: The two major Superiors are both members by right: one is the former Superior General and the other is a current Assistant General. For these two Provinces, the Brothers will then elect the number of delegates to which they are entitled.
- 3- The Districts Divina Providencia (Argentina - Bolivia - Chile - Uruguay) and Saint Francis Xavier (Indonesia - Japan - Philippines): These two Districts have fewer than 30 Brothers. However, since they have the same number of Brothers, it would be impossible to treat them differently; each entity will be entitled to one elected delegate.

- 4- St. John Paul II District (Rwanda - DR Congo): All the Brothers of the District will participate in the election of one Rwandan and one Congolese delegate. If a voter chooses two Brothers from the same sector, his ballot will be declared void.
- 5- Province of Saint Michael the Archangel (Kenya - Tanzania): All the Brothers of the District will participate in the election of one Kenyan and one Tanzanian delegate. If a voter chooses two Brothers from the same sector, his ballot will be declared void.
- 6- District of Saint-Pierre Chanel (Tahiti - Marquesas): This District, having a number of Brothers less than the quantum, will have only one delegate who will be the Major Superior. The Brothers will elect a substitute in case the Brother Visitor will be prevented to attend.

### **DELEGATE ALLOCATION TABLE FOR THE 2024 GENERAL CHAPTER**

<b>PROVINCES ET DISTRICTS</b>	<b>BROTHERS<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>DELEGATES<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>BY RIGHT</b>	<b>TO ELECT</b>
Saint Michael the Archangel	41	2	0	2
Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus	184	9	1	8
Saint-Jean-Paul II	56	3	1	2
Saint-Paul	40	2	1	1
Divina Providencia	23	2	1	1
Jean de la Mennais	81	4	1	3
Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague	53	3	1	2

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<sup>4</sup> Number of professed Brothers

<sup>5</sup> Number of delegates

Saint Francis Xavier	23	2	1	1
Nuestra Señora del Pilar	54	3	1	2
Saint-Jean-Baptiste – San Pietro	130	7	0	7
Saint-Pierre-Chanel	9	1	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>29</b>

In addition to these **38** delegates, there are **4** members of the General Council, the former Superior General (**1**) and **2** non-voting members of the General Administration.

The Chapter will therefore consist of:

<p><b>14</b> ex-officio members and <b>29</b> elected members,  which makes <b>43 voting members</b>  and <b>2 non-voting members</b>,  for a total of <b>45 members.</b></p>
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## II STEPS TOWARD THE 2024 CHAPTER

25 March 2023	Counting the number of Brothers in the Congregation in order to determine the number of delegates per Province or District. According to the Chapter Book, this count is made one year before the opening of the General Chapter.
31 March 2023	Sending of the circular presenting the General Chapter
28 May 2023	Solemnity of Pentecost. Celebration of entry into the preparation of the Chapter. Launching the theme of the General Chapter.
June – July 2023	Election of Capitulants: The General Secretariat sends the ballots to the major superiors who organize the elections in their Province or District.
31 July 2023	Arrival at the General Secretariat of the minutes of the elections of the delegates to the General Chapter.
September 2023	Sending the letter of convocation to the General Chapter.
	Launching of the seven-step journey to the Chapter and of various contributions requested from the Lay people and the Brothers.
6 March–24 April 2024	Celebration of the 28th General Chapter.

As indicated in the chart, the date of **May 28, 2023**, when the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Pentecost, is chosen as the official opening of the year of preparation for the General Chapter. As in the past for the early Church, Mary prays with us and intercedes for us. She asks the Holy Spirit to pour out his light, his peace and all the riches of his grace upon us<sup>6</sup>. May she help us to leave everything to go to Jesus: it is He who baptizes in the Spirit!

At the appropriate time, a proposal for a celebration will be sent to the Provinces and Districts.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, S I, 99.

### III ELECTIONS OF DELEGATES

#### 1- Some preliminary remarks

Before getting into the election procedures, allow me to make a few, perhaps not unnecessary reminders, about the meaning, for us Brothers, of choosing delegates for the General Chapter. You know very well that the Capitulants do not come to the Chapter to defend personal interests or those of a group: they come to make their fraternal contribution to the common quest for God's will for the whole Congregation.

I therefore invite each Brother to enter into a true spiritual process of discernment before making the choice of the delegate (or delegates) whom he will elect. *"Consultation among Brothers is permitted, but all must refrain from campaigning for or against anyone"* (Chapter Book 12).

I also remind you that each Brother should vote only in the Province or District to which he belongs, or in his electoral constituency. The Provincial or Visitor will take the necessary steps to make this clear to everyone.

#### 2- Procedures for elections

**All the Brothers of temporary vows and of perpetual vows are electors.**

**The Brother Secretary General**, after having consulted the major Superior of each electoral constituency, **draws up the list of eligible Brothers** (who must be perpetually professed). He sends it to the Provincials and Visitors who are responsible for organizing the elections.

### 3- Two rounds of voting

We will take up here the recommendations of the Chapter Book which are addressed to all the administrative units of the Congregation. I invite each major Superior to see to it that they are carefully followed in order to preserve the proper conduct of these elections and, in so doing, of the Chapter itself.

The election of delegates, as it is written in the Chapter Book (no. 15), takes place in two rounds.

**In the first round**, those Brothers who have obtained at least an absolute majority of the votes cast, that is, 50% + 1 of the valid votes, are declared elected, up to the number of delegates to be elected.

**In the second round**, a relative majority is sufficient. Those who have the most votes after the delegates are designated as substitutes. There are as many substitutes as there are delegates.

### 4- Organization of the first ballot

**In community, the time of the vote** (C.B. n° 13):

- 1- After the reading of this circular, and at least three days before the date set for the vote, the Brother Superior of the community posts in the community hall or any other appropriate place the list of eligible Brothers of the Province, District or electoral constituency which the major Superior will have previously sent.
- 2- Triduum to the Holy Spirit: During the three days preceding the vote, morning and evening, the community invokes the Holy Spirit with an appropriate prayer or song.
- 3- On the day and at the time fixed for the election, the Superior gathers the Brothers of his community and gives each one the ballot. Together they invoke the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and our Founders.



- 4- Each elector, after having expressed his choice clearly and legibly on his ballot paper, slips it into an envelope on which nothing should be written.
- 5- He then places this envelope in another envelope placed at the disposal of the community by the Superior. All the voters sign this common envelope.
- 6- This envelope is sealed by the community Superior in front of all the Brothers.
- 7- It is then placed in another envelope to be sent to the Brother Provincial or the Brother Visitor.

### **The counting of votes**

The Brother Provincial or Visitor keeps the envelopes containing the ballot papers, without opening them, until the time set for their counting. He appoints a committee of four Brothers who, under his chairmanship, on the appointed day, designate from among themselves two tellers and two secretaries and proceed to count the votes.

### **Minutes for the first round**

The Brother Provincial or the Brother Visitor draws up the minutes of the first round of voting (see Appendix 1)<sup>7</sup> in three copies. The members of the commission sign the minutes. Two copies are sent to the General Secretariat; the third is inserted in a sealed envelope in the presence of the members of the counting commission who sign it. The ballot papers are destroyed without delay in the presence of witnesses.

### **5- Organization of the second round of voting**

It is up to the Brother Provincial or Visitor to draw up the voting sheet for the second round<sup>8</sup>. He enters on the voting sheet only those Brothers who have obtained 10% and more of the votes, in the order of the votes obtained. The

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<sup>7</sup> Page 20

<sup>8</sup> Page 21

results of the first round are sent without delay to the Brothers, specifying the deadlines for the second round.

In the second round, the Brothers may choose a name other than those who have obtained 10%.

Voting in the community takes place as in the first round.

### **Counting and minutes for the second round**

The counting of votes for the second round is organized in the same way as for the first round. The minutes of the second round<sup>9</sup> are also drawn up in the same way as for the first round.

### **6- Date of dispatch of the minutes**

The minutes of the first and second rounds shall be sent to the General Secretariat by **July 31, 2023** at the latest. The final list of delegates and substitutes, after the second round, is established in the order of the votes obtained.

### **7- Promulgation**

By circular letter, the Brother Superior General informs the Institute of the results of the ballot.

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<sup>9</sup> Page 22

## IV SERVANTS OF HOPE

At Cana, Mary invites us to listen to and to put into practice the Word of the Lord. Jesus asks us to fill the jars with water and to bring the good wine of the New Covenant. This represents a whole program of life and of daily commitment if we want to be "**servants of hope**"! May this time of preparation for the next General Chapter be a favorable moment to listen to one another, and all to the Holy Spirit!

### 1- Communing with Mary's compassion

*"On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus had also been invited to the wedding with his disciples. But they ran out of wine. Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no wine' " (Jn 2:1-3).*

In response to an unforeseen event that risks overshadowing the joy of the wedding at Cana, the evangelist John highlights Mary's benevolence and thoughtfulness. As an attentive woman, she informs Jesus and asks him to remedy this situation of want. By such a compassionate attitude, Mary imitates the considerate style of God who is always ready to deliver us from our fears and save us from all our anxieties (Ps 33:5-7). Her compassionate presence reminds us that there is no day in our lives when we cease to be the focus of God's attention, who responds to our needs and does not abandon us in our hour of trial. In so doing, through her intercession: "*They have no wine*" (Jn 2:3), Mary becomes the Handmaid of hope. She believes with all her heart that her Son will not remain indifferent to the discomfort of newlyweds.

*"The mother of Jesus was there"* (Jn 2:1). In spiritual theology, Mary's presence is regularly associated with service, compassion and intercession. Thus, after the annunciation, she goes to her cousin Elizabeth and helps her with the humble tasks of daily life (Lk 1:56). At the foot of the cross, she stays with her Son (Jn 19:25). At the birth of the Church, she is there in the upper room and intercedes with the Apostles, waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). For Pope Francis, Mary, by her very presence, is the new Rachel<sup>10</sup> capable of sharing our despair, wiping away our tears and uniting her tears with ours.

In the Church, Mary is often presented as the Star who sustained and guided the hope of the disciples of her Son Jesus. *"She is always there, faithfully present, whenever a candle needs to be held alight in a place of mist and fog."*<sup>11</sup> Through her faithful presence and intercession, our sadness will be changed into joy, our darkness into light, our fragility into opportunity, our lack into abundance. Such is the conviction of St. Bernard of Clairvaux when he writes:

*"O man, whoever you are, who in this tide of the world feel yourself carried adrift among storms and tempests, do not take your eyes off the light of this star... In perils, in anguish, in critical situations, invoke Mary, cry out to Mary! Let her name not leave your lips, let it not leave your heart, and to obtain the favour of her prayers, do not cease to imitate her life. If you follow her, you will not go astray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; if you keep her in your mind, you will not take a false step. Let her hold you, you will not fall. Let her protect you, you will not fear. Under her guidance, you will not tire. Thanks to her favour, you will reach the port."*<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his life, Jean-Marie de la Mennais developed a filial love for the Virgin Mary. When he was

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis : The Hope of Rachel, January 4, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis : Mary, Mother of Hope, May 10, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Extracts from the second homily: Super Missus est, 17.

orphaned at the age of seven, Mary was a safe refuge for him, his Morning Star. On the strength of this experience, our Founder always presented her to his Brothers as a Mother who nourishes the hope of her children ( S I, 538) and who is always ready to take us in her arms ( S I, 515). For him, Jesus can refuse nothing to the one who educated him in the humble house of Nazareth (S I, 618). Full of compassion, Mary touches our wounds, binds them and heals them with maternal kindness (S I, 645-646). After Christ, she is our hope (S I, 635-636) and participates actively in all our struggles. Her goodness, kindness and tenderness never fail us (S I, 623). Walking beside us in sunshine or rain, in heat or cold, on plains or over mountains, she gradually teaches us that nothing is impossible for God (Lk 1:37).

In order to become like her, "**servants of hope**", Mary invites us to take the path of benevolent and considerate compassion. The first step is to look at our reality as a person, as a community and as a Congregation, with the eyes of faith and the ears of the heart. By doing this assessment with the help of the Marian pedagogy, we will identify the weaknesses that darken our personal life, that tarnish the joy of fraternal life in community and that block the vitality and fruitfulness of our Institute. Happy are we if we manage to present them to the Lord through Mary! A new life is already springing forth! Hope is reborn!

**Communing with Mary's compassion:**

- What do we want to present to Jesus through Mary so that our lives as Mennaisian: Brothers or Laypeople, may be more hopeful for ourselves and for others, especially for the most disadvantaged children and youth?
- What do we ask the Lord for our Province/District and for the Congregation?

## 2- Daring to call upon the hour of Jesus

*"Jesus answered her, "Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4).*

Following Mary's intercession, Jesus answers that *"his hour has not yet come"*. What does this mean? In the Johannine tradition, *"the hour of Jesus"* signifies a double reality. First, his death and resurrection, and therefore his glorification. But also, a choice freely made, without any pressure from anyone. In fact, no one lays hands on Jesus because *"his hour has not yet come"* (Jn 8:20). Or again: *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son"* (Jn 17:1).

Strengthened by her faith, Mary dares to call upon the hour of Jesus. She asks him to anticipate it. Her intercession becomes an announcement and a provocation. Thus, the distressing situation of the newlyweds at Cana is transformed into a *kairos* in which Jesus, at the invitation of his Mother, is called to manifest his glory.

Indeed, Jesus accepts to anticipate his hour when we present him, with faith, our infirmities or those of others. Didn't he heal the paralyzed man whose bearers had torn down the roof of the house so that he could touch him (Mk. 2:1-12)? Did he not give new life to the woman who had been losing blood for twelve years and who had spent all her possessions at the doctor's (Lk 8:43-48)? Did not the blind Bartimaeus regain his sight (Mk 10:46-52)? When, aware of our poverty and fragility, we cry out to the Lord with confidence, he cannot remain indifferent to our calls and our sufferings. He is always ready to answer us, even if it upsets his timing.

In the biblical and ecclesial tradition, the Lord writes the history of salvation with the humble and the little ones. Why? Because they know how to hope against all hope. For them, nothing is impossible for God. Indeed, Sarah and Abraham (Gen 18:10), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24), Elizabeth and Zechariah (Lk 1:11-13) knew how to wait in faith for God's hour. This is the conviction of Pope Francis

when he says: "*The only certainty that saves us is hope in God. He saves us because he is strong and makes us walk through life with joy, with the desire to do good, with the desire to become happy for eternity.*"<sup>13</sup>

The biblical story presents Abraham as a pilgrim in faith: he leaves his land for a country he does not know, he waits for the child of the promise and then, to top it all off, he agrees to sacrifice him. His hope, nourished by his faith, opens up new horizons, makes him capable of dreaming what is not even imaginable. It "*makes him enter the darkness of an uncertain future to walk in the light*"<sup>14</sup> and "*gives him so much strength*" to dare to believe and to wait for God's hour.

Hope sustained by faith teaches us to knock at the door of God's heart: he is always ready to save us. It sustains our courage and boldness when we ask him to anticipate his hour. Hope overcomes our timidity when we present our own frailties and the infirmities of our brothers and sisters to him. It loosens our tongues when we call upon him for help even if it is not yet his hour.

For Jean-Marie de la Mennais, faith, the greatest of all graces (S II, 116), is the light that illuminates and the sun that warms the life of the Brother. It gives meaning and significance to all his actions by making him see "*the dawn of the eternal day*" (S I, 130) and allows him to abandon himself gently into the arms of divine Providence like simple and docile children (GC I, 39). If he keeps his faith burning, it helps him to go forward always, even if he walks from time to time in the night and the path is strewn with thorns and briars (Rule of 1825). Thus, full of confidence, the Brother does not hesitate to present to the Lord his concerns, his regrets, his sorrows, his despairs and his weaknesses (GC I, 149). Only

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis : The Hope of Abraham – Rm 4, 18, December 28, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

faith is capable of the “*rebirth*”<sup>15</sup> in his life of the miracles of Jesus' time.

If we want to be "**servants of hope**", we must learn from Mary to rely on the audacity that faith gives us to dare to call upon the hour of Jesus. His glory is that we be women and men who stand up, who are creative and inventive in following him and serving him. What are we waiting for to cry out to him? He is ready to anticipate his hour. On one condition: that we trust him like simple and docile children, like Sarah and Abraham, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph!

**Daring to call on Jesus' hour:**

- For which new community dreams would we like Jesus to anticipate his hour?
- Today, which “*miracles of Jesus*” would we dare to ask for our Province or District, for the Institute?

### **3- Listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord**

*"His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever he tells you, do it' " (Jn 2:5).*

To face the lack of wine at the wedding in Cana, Mary recommends to the servants to do whatever her Son tells them. In concrete terms, she asks them to listen to and put into practice the Word of the Lord. By the way, in all the Gospels, this is the only word of Mary addressed to all humanity. It is a sharing of life, a testimony. Her whole life was one of listening to and fulfilling the Word of God: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word*" (Lk 1:38). Didn't Jesus himself praise his mother by presenting her as the one who listens to the Word of God and keeps it (Lk 11:28)? The Magnificat, the hymn of hope par

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<sup>15</sup> Philippe Friot, *Spirituality of a Man of Action*, p. 76



excellence, is a splendid synthesis of the long meditation of the Old Testament by the one who learned to remember the Torah and the teaching of the prophets.

In the biblical literature, the one who hears and puts into practice the Word of the Lord is compared to a tree planted by a stream whose foliage remains green and bears fruit in its time (Ps 1:3). He is like a house built on rock, able to withstand storms, winds and floods (Mt 7:24). He belongs to the new family of Jesus (Mt 12:50). He has a lamp on his journey to light his way (Ps 118:105). In other words, listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord teaches us to serve him faithfully, day and night, in stillness or in storm.

In the Church, the Word of God is considered the food that nourishes Christian hope. By listening to it, meditating on it and putting it into practice, the Christian gradually discovers that only God can quench the fundamental thirst that is in his heart, that of eternal life (Jn 6:68). What makes him truly happy is every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4). Enthused by the beauty of his encounter with the Word of God, he burns with the desire to announce to others the One in whom he has placed all his hope (Rom 8:24).

Listening to and regularly consulting the Word of God is also a true "*therapy of hope*"<sup>16</sup>. The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) is a beautiful illustration of this. In the midst of their sadness and disappointments, the Risen One joins them and walks beside them, even if they are going in the wrong direction. Thus, by listening to them, by offering them the Word of life and the testimony of his love, he warms their hearts and rekindles the flame of hope in them.

Listening to the Word of God leads to conversion which consists in turning one's gaze towards Jesus, getting to know

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<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis : The Hope of the Two Disciples of Emmaus, May 24, 2017

him better, being conformed to him and becoming more like him. All this leads to placing Christ at the center of one's life. This is the decision taken by St. Francis of Assisi after hearing the proclamation of the Gospel of the rich young man (Mk 10:17-31): *"Whoever experiences God's faithful love and consolation in his life is able, and even has the duty, to be close to his weaker brothers and sisters and to take charge of their frailties."*<sup>17</sup> Didn't the poor man from Assisi rebuild the chapel of San Damiano? This was his way of comforting the Church.

As in the past for the disciples of Emmaus, God continues to walk with us in Jesus. This mysterious companionship gives us the strength to live the present in a new way, even when it is difficult and harsh. It is the new breath that pushes us to return to Jerusalem to meet our brothers. Is not hope a dynamism that keeps us always on the way and makes us move forward at God's pace?

When reading the writings of Jean-Marie de la Mennais, it is always striking to note his keen knowledge of and attachment to the Word of God. His sermons are steeped in Sacred Scripture and the texts of the Fathers of the Church. He made them the soul of his life and of his apostolate. It was *"the spur"* (S I, 363) that pushed him forward with total trust in God. He received this *"food with joy in his heart"* (S I, 474). In his sermons, he often advised young people and Brothers to listen to the Word of the *"Divine Master"* with *"an attentive mind and a docile heart"* if they wanted to be cured of their *"spiritual infirmity"* (S I, 474). Without this attitude of *"recollection"*, it will be impossible for them to close their ears to the noise of the world in order to listen to the *"truth that teaches within"* (S I, 484). This is the condition for letting the Word of God, that beneficent *"dew"* (S I, 485), renew us from within (S I, 524) in order to discover its *"wonderful results"* (S I, 603).

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis : Christian Hope, Constance and Consolation (cf. Rm 15, 1-6), March 22, 2017.

The best school for learning to be "*servants of hope*" is listening to and applying the Word of God. Like Mary, the Word must become embodied in our lives. To achieve this, like those who served at the wedding in Cana, we are called to be ready to do whatever Jesus asks of us. If we happen to fall on the road or walk in the wrong direction, let us be joined, like the disciples of Emmaus, by the Risen One who will certainly rekindle in us the flame of hope, born of listening to his Word and of witnessing his love.

**Listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord:**

**Local Community:**

- What is the Lord asking us to do? What does he expect from us? What grace would we like to receive in order to achieve what he asks of us?

**Province - District:**

- Same questions as for the local community.

#### **4- Filling the jars with water**

*"Now there were six stone jars there for the ritual purifications of the Jews, each containing two or three measures (that is, about a hundred liters). Jesus said to those who were serving, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them to the brim" (Jn 2:6-7).*

After Mary's exhortation and at Jesus' command, the servants at the wedding in Cana fill with water the six jars that were intended for the ritual purifications of the Jews. The evangelist John finds it important to specify that they "*filled them to the brim*" (Jn 2:7b). Before going any further, two details are worth noting which may help us to better understand the attitude of those who served at this wedding.

The first detail is the "*container*". Jesus does not ask to fill empty wineskins. Therefore, "*new wine, new wineskins*" (Mk 2:22). As fragile objects, the jars have a double function:

to draw water (Jn 4:7,11) and to transport it (Jn 4:28). This container is also associated with the notion of scarcity and abundance. Indeed, the widow of Zarephath has a handful of flour in a jar; she gathers wood to prepare her last cakes for her son and for herself. By trusting in the word of the prophet Elijah and sharing the little she has, the jar of flour does not run out (1 Kings 17:7-16). Thus, from our frailties, God can bring forth a new and superabundant life. What a beautiful hope the notion of the jar already communicates!

The second element to emphasize is the content. Jesus asks the servants to fill the jars with water. In the Bible, water is above all the symbol of life. It "*cleanses everything it enters, and life appears in every place where the stream comes*" (Ezek 47:9). For the prophet Isaiah, giving water is like pouring out the spirit of life. When God gives water, the desert flourishes again. When he pours out his spirit, man's heart is renewed (Is 44:2-3). In the New Testament, this same idea is developed by the evangelist Matthew: John baptizes in water and Jesus in the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11). Thus, water contains the best promise of life that man can offer and receive from God.

By filling the jars with water, the servants at the wedding in Cana take the Word of the Lord seriously and offer, in clay vessels, the best of themselves. They put all their generosity into it: the jars are filled "*to the brim*" (Jn 2:7b). This is their contribution to the miracle of water turned into good wine, their participation in the feast of the New Covenant. Even if they have carried out the Lord's orders well, they are still useless servants: they have only done their duty (Lk 17:10).

Filling the jars is an act of obedience to the Word of the Lord. In fact, every "yes" to Jesus, the Word of God, is a seed, or rather, a service to hope, because it pushes us towards our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest. Rightly, "*the Word of God nourishes hope,*" says Pope Francis, "*hope that is*

*concretely translated into sharing and reciprocal service.*"<sup>18</sup> Courageous in their faith and bold in their work, the servants of Cana acted as if everything depended on them, knowing that in reality everything depends on God. This allowed them to serve their brothers who were in danger of losing hope and to bear the weaknesses of those who needed comfort and support along the way. A true act of charity! Doesn't the love of God and neighbour renew everything it touches? Does it not transform all those it serves? Is it not this power that excuses all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1 Cor 13:7)? It is the logic of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies and bears much fruit (Jn 12:24). It is the leaven that makes the dough rise (Mt 13:33).

Jean-Marie de la Mennais always exhorted the Brothers to give the best of themselves in the service of God and of the young people entrusted to them. Thus, he invited them to work each day with new courage and great zeal for the glory of the One who had called them while maintaining their confidence in God alone (GC V, 479). What the Lord asked of them, he said, was not primarily success or achievement, but the generous and total offering of their lives (S II, 628). He often reminded them that *"God's work does not depend on this or that man"* (GC VI, 120) but that the Lord "always uses the weakest to accomplish the most important tasks" (S I, 86).

As "**servants of hope**", we are invited to commit ourselves in turn to the path of generous availability. What does this mean? To take the Word of the Lord seriously by offering him, in our fragile vessels, the best of ourselves and by pouring a full measure, packed, shaken, overflowing into the aprons of our brothers and sisters (Lk 6:38). This is our collaboration in the miracle of today and of tomorrow. It is our offering to the feast of the New Covenant.

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis, Catechesis: Christian Hope, Constance and Consolation (cf. Rm 15, 1-6), March 22, 2017

### **Filling the Jars:**

So that we may be "**servants of hope**":

- What is the best that our local community has to offer to the Lord, to the Brothers, to the educational community, to the Mennaisian Family, to children and youth?
- What is the best that the Congregation (Province or District) has to offer to the Lord, to the Brothers, to the Mennaisian Family, to children and youth?

## **5- Drawing and Serving the Wine**

*"Jesus said to them, 'Now draw from it and take it to the master of the feast.' They took it to him" (Jn 2:8).*

After filling the six jars to the brim with water, Jesus asks the servants at the wedding in Cana to draw water and bring it to the host. What is it? Water? No, good wine! In fact, the Lord sends them to bring the Good News of his wonders. The feast can go on for there is no shortage of wine. From now on, their mission is to serve the Gospel and bring the joy of the Good News.

In biblical literature, wine symbolizes joy. When consumed in moderation, it brings joy to the heart of man (Ps 103:15). Thanks to the salvation granted by the Lord, the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim will be able to rejoice as if they had drunk wine (Zech 10:7). To this beverage is also associated an element of consolation. According to Old Testament tradition, Noah was the first man to plant a vineyard from which he derived great comfort (Gen 9:20-21). Introducing the messianic times, the prophet Isaiah announces that the Lord is preparing a meal of fatty meats and heady wines for all peoples (Is 25:6). Paul recommends to Timothy to take some wine for his stomach and his frequent discomfort (1 Tim 5:23).

By bringing the new wine to the master of the meal, the servants at the wedding in Cana are already participating in

the mission of the Messiah announced by the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed"* (Lk 4:18). The "now" (Jn 2:7) of the servants at the wedding in Cana is part of the realization of the "today" of Jesus (Lk 4:21). From now on, it is our turn to draw and serve the new wine.

Nowadays, consecrated life needs to rediscover the new wine of joy that fills the hearts and lives of all those who have encountered Christ. How can we bring it to children and young people, to the members of the educational community and to all those who come into contact with us, if our jars are empty and our lamps have no oil? We then run the risk of announcing a Good News that has lost its fragrance, its freshness and its authenticity. And yet, it is our mission to share the joy of the Gospel. *"With Christ,"* Pope Francis reminds us, *"joy is always born and reborn."*<sup>19</sup> It is essentially missionary (Lk 10:17). No one can be excluded from it and nothing can take it away from us. Who else will bring the consolation of Christ's friendship if we do not go out to bear witness to it? May the boldness and ardor of Paul (1 Cor 9:16) seize us and impel us to go out and bring the joy of the Gospel to all those who are waiting for it without knowing it!

Bringing joy is the mission of every Christian, and even more so of every consecrated person. A sad disciple of the Kingdom of God does not evangelize this world. Only the spark of true happiness can give it the hope it so badly needs. *"When the sky is all cloudy, he who can speak of the sun is a blessing."*<sup>20</sup> Thus, by sowing joy, the Christian becomes a missionary of the One in whom he hopes. This is his pedagogy for spreading the smile of God and the consolation of the Lord. Is Jesus not the Brother who takes care of each one of

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no 1.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, *Catechesis: Missionary of Hope Today*, p. 62

us, who carries us on his shoulders when we are tired and who wraps us in his tenderness and thoughtfulness? The Comforter par excellence is the Holy Spirit. He is a gentle host, a coolness that heals what is wounded and warms what is cold. Following his example, we are invited to be consolers and defenders of our brothers and sisters, advocates and comforters.

In his sermons and writings, Jean-Marie de la Mennais often refers to joy. The fruit of an encounter with the Lord ( S II, 404) and a gift of the Holy Spirit ( S I, 352), joy expresses our happiness in following Christ, in being faithful to him, in obeying him, in doing the will of the Father and in living in humility. It expresses our love and our total gift to the Lord: *"There is no happiness except in God, no true peace and joy except in his service and in his love"* ( S I, 480). It confirms our progress on the path of holiness (S I, 355), of virtue (S I, 332), of charity (GC V, 528), of consolation (S I, 556) and of mutual help (Rule of 1835).

In our commitment to be "**servants of hope**", we are called to witness to our joy in following the Lord. This is the urgent service that children and youth, parents and faculty expect of us. *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor 9:7). *"Fraternal love multiplies our ability to experience joy, since it makes us rejoice in the good of others."*<sup>21</sup> God counts on our audacity, our courage and our enthusiasm to bring the joy of the Gospel to all the existential peripheries of our world.

**Drawing and bringing the new wine:**

To draw and bring the new wine of the joy of the Gospel:

- What challenges does this represent for the local community?
- What challenges does this represent for our apostolic commitments?
- What challenges does this represent for the Congregation (Province - District)?

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<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, no 167.



## 6- Savouring the New Wine

*"And the master of the feast tasted the water turned into wine. He did not know where the wine came from, but those who served knew, for they had drawn the water. Then the master of the meal called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk well, the less good wine is brought. But you have kept the good wine until now" (Jn 2:9-10).*

Contrary to custom, the newlyweds have kept the good wine until the end. This is what the master of the meal said when he tasted the new wine that the servants at the wedding in Cana had brought him. In reality, Jesus reveals to us, through this sign, that God is always committed to giving us the best. He desires our happiness and offers it to us freely, just as good wine gives us its flavour and goodness. It is this New Covenant of love that we are all invited to joyfully celebrate. It is an eternal wedding: there is no lack of new wine and it is of superior quality.

Our entire salvation history is marked by this commitment of God to offer us the best. Indeed, the Lord plants a garden in Eden, places man in it, and makes all kinds of trees with tasty fruit grow from the ground (Gen 2:8). To the Israelites walking in the desert, he promises a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 33:3). He wants peace for his people and his faithful (Ps 84,9). When we are hungry, he offers us bread to our fill (Mk 6:38-44). He does not hesitate to clothe us in the best garment and to have the fatted calf killed when we return home (Lk 11:22-24). The beatitudes, the New Covenant presented by Jesus, the New Moses, show us the way to true happiness (Mt 5:1-12). In the person of the Son, the Father offers us the most wonderful gift: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (Jn 3:16).

From the beginning, spiritual theology has constantly reminded us that man is created for the true happiness that

is found in God alone. The human being, says St Augustine, is made for God and his heart is restless until it rests in Him. If happiness is a gift from God, it is also a human conquest. Thus, he who is faithful to the Lord and puts his Word into practice achieves his full realisation in the gift of self. Paradoxical as it may seem, the best that God offers us can sometimes come through the cross. It is the pains of childbirth that lead to the joy of birth. It is the way of the cross that leads to the resurrection. It is the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies that bears much fruit (Jn 12:24). This happiness found, shared and welcomed in God is the other name for holiness, which is the most beautiful face of the Church and the best that God promises. In fact, *"every saint is a mission; he or she is a project of the Father to reflect and embody"*<sup>22</sup> the beatitude to which we are all called. It is the eternal wedding of the New Covenant in which we are invited to participate with Jesus and Mary.

To give the new wine to savour is to offer Christ to the world. Jesus is the greatest grace of life. He is the most perfect, the most fulfilled and the happiest man. He is the Holy One. He is the new wine that men and women today are thirsting. *"In a wonderful way he brings youth to our world, and everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life."*<sup>23</sup> He is our Hope. He is the best wine we can offer to the children and young people of our time.

The new wine that Jean-Marie de la Mennais expects from us is holiness. It is our vocation and our mission: it is by making saints that we will sanctify ourselves (GC V, 209). On this path, he invites us to imitate the perfections of the Son, to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ and to be his living image (S II, 631-632). His goodness, mercy, justice and patience must be our daily compass ( S II, 636). This is the secret of access to his inheritance, happiness, kingdom and glory (S II, 225).

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no 19.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, no 1.

To learn to be "**servants of hope**", our Rule of Life leads us to live the spirit of the Beatitudes (D 29). The decision to update the Rule of Life testifies to our commitment to receive the new wine of the New Covenant in new wineskins. Will we be able to take advantage of this *kairos* to start again from Christ in order to be his living image for our Brothers in community, for the Lay people of the Mennaisian Family, for the members of the educational community? Do we dare to invite those around us to savour our new wine? If so, we are anticipating the eternal wedding to which we are all called. Blessed are we: God always offers us the best part!

### **Savouring the new wine:**

To bring to fruition the best we have received from the Lord:

- How do we respond to the Lord's calls to holiness?
- What thanksgiving(s) do we give?
- What request(s) for forgiveness do we make?
- What grace(s) do we ask for?

## **7- Welcoming the Sign**

*"Such was the beginning of the signs that Jesus performed. It was in Cana of Galilee. He manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2:11).*

In John's Gospel, Jesus performs his first sign through the intervention of Mary. Why did he respond favourably to his Mother? The evangelist provides a key that gives us a better understanding of the miracle of Cana. Jesus *"manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him"* (Jn 2:11c). In other words, the aim is to awaken faith. To believe is to accept the Sign that is Jesus.

In Johannine literature, a sign is an indication that reveals God's love in a discreet way. It is a gesture that responds to a simple and concrete need of ordinary people. It is God's preferred *modus operandi*. Indeed, the multiplication

of the loaves (Jn 6:1-14) refers to Jesus, the Bread of Life (Jn 6:35). The healing of the blind man (Jn 9:1-41) means that Christ is the Light of the world (Jn 8:12). The resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-57) indicates that he is the Life. For John, to believe is to adhere to the person of Jesus who reveals the Father's love, tenderness and goodness. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). Like the bronze serpent that was the source of salvation for the Israelites in the desert, the Son of Man gives eternal life to everyone who believes (Jn 3:14-15).

In the Christian tradition, faith always comes from a personal encounter with Christ and involves the whole human being. It is the starting point of a radical conversion insofar as the person opens himself to love. The act of believing then makes one available to always allow oneself to be transformed anew by God's call. Faith is also born of listening, which helps to distinguish the voice of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:3-5). It is also associated with vision: the more the Christian believes, the more he becomes able to see, recognise and contemplate the glory of God (Jn 11:40). Commenting on the passage about the woman with severe bleeding who touches Jesus in order to be healed (Lk 8:45-46), St Augustine says: *"To touch with the heart is to believe."*<sup>24</sup> Faith is a response to an encounter with Christ and is lived and celebrated in community. Tertullian described it so well: *"After the bath of the new birth"*<sup>25</sup>, the new Christian is welcomed into the house of the Mother to raise his hands and pray the Lord's Prayer with his brothers: he now belongs to a new family.

Welcoming the Sign amounts to going out like Abraham in the night, at God's invitation, to see the stars that renew his commitment and his fidelity (Gen 15:5). From now on, the child of the promise and his numerous descendants will not

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<sup>24</sup> Saint Augustin, Sermon 229-L2 : PLS2,576 : « *Tangere autem corde, hoc est credere* ».

<sup>25</sup> Tertullian, cf. De Baptismo, 20,5 : CCI 1, 225.

be long in coming. It is opening our hearts to his Word, leaven and force of transformation for our lives. Thus, the signs will multiply for us and because of us. It means keeping our candle burning even in the darkest of nights. Then we will pass on the light by contagion and attraction. It is journeying with Him on our road to Emmaus. As heirs of a people of travellers, we are attracted by the dawn on the horizon. The wind of the Holy Spirit pushes us forward, keeps us on the way and makes us feel like pilgrims and strangers. Is not faith our anchor in heaven? But how do we reach it? We hold on to the rope! This is what it means to welcome the Sign that is Jesus.

In order to help the Brothers to welcome Jesus as the Sign, Jean-Marie de la Mennais invites them to contemplate the mystery of the birth of the Word of God at Christmas. The *"swaddling clothes"*, the *"straw on which Jesus Christ is laid, his poverty, his weakness"* reveal the Messiah announced by the prophets ( S I, 398). The abasement of the Son of God, his humility, his silence, his destitution and his abandonment must strengthen our faith ( S II, 404). Like the shepherds, after contemplating the One who is the Sign, *"full of strength and joy"*, we will return from Bethlehem *"giving glory to God and filled with a sincere desire to make our Saviour our model in everything"* ( S II, 404). When the time comes, we will glorify ourselves *"only in the cross of Jesus Christ"*. This will be the sign that we have become his disciples and that we have committed ourselves to *"walk in his footsteps, to follow him at all costs"* (S I, 372).

As **"servants of hope"**, welcoming Jesus is fundamental. He is the source and summit of our hope. Without him, we are dry and empty. We can do nothing without the Master. By listening to him with the ears of our heart, by contemplating him with the eyes of faith, by touching him with the tenderness of our hands, by adoring him with the strength of our being, we will come to take him as our model in everything. Then, in our turn, we will be prophets and signs for others.

**Welcoming the Sign:**

- Local community:
  - o For which signs of Jesus do we want to give thanks?
  - o What signs of Jesus should we welcome today?
- Congregation (Province - District):
  - o The same questions...

## **Prayer in preparation for the next General Chapter**

Mary, Handmaid of Hope,  
at the wedding in Cana, you are considerate  
and you intercede with your Son Jesus.

Present to him today, in our name,  
the needs of the Mennaisian Family.  
In his hour, he will know how to meet them  
so that out of our shortcomings and frailties  
a new life will emerge.

In this time of preparation  
for our 28th General Chapter,  
trusting in your maternal care,  
we wish to imitate your faith and your audacity  
and offer to the children and young people of today  
the new wine of the Gospel.

Teach us, as you did at Cana,  
to welcome your Son Jesus  
and to do whatever he tells us.  
Make us servants of hope,  
compassionate and attentive,  
courageous, faithful and bold witnesses,  
joyful in the footsteps of their Master.

God alone in time!  
God alone in eternity!

**Amen!**

**Brother Hervé Zamor, S.G.  
February 11, 2023  
on the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes**

**Appendix 1: Election of Delegates to the General Chapter 2024**

*Minutes of the FIRST ROUND*

(Two copies are sent to the Secretary General, and one by e-mail)

Province/District	
Place of vote counting	
Date	
Vote counting Commission	Brother Provincial/Visiteur :
	Bro
	Bro
	Bro
	Bro

Number of voters		Number of delegates to elect		Ballots received	
Blank ballots		Void ballots		Valid ballots	
Absolute majority (Calculated from valid ballots)					

*Blank ballot: Nothing has been written on it.*

*Void ballot: They are more crosses than the number of Brothers to elect or the ballot is illegible.*

*Valid ballot: The number of chosen delegates is at least equal to the number of delegates to be elected.*



**RESULTS OF THE VOTING PROCESS**

Have been elected, with more than 50% of votes, delegates to the Chapter after the first round :	
Names	Number of votes :

Have received more than 10% of votes in order of the number of votes received (for the second round)	
Names	Number of votes

**TO ORGANISE THE SECOND ROUND, SEE APPENDIX 2**

If all delegates have been elected after the first round, are substitutes those who follow in number of votes. (There are the same number of substitutes than delegates)	

*Signature of the members of the commission*

**Appendix 2: Election of Delegates to the General Chapter 2024**

**BALLOT FOR THE SECOND ROUND**

What is in *italics* is to be completed by the Provincial or Visitor before sending this ballot for the second round.

The following Brothers have obtained more than 10% of the votes after the first round. Their names appear in the order of the votes obtained.

You choose \_\_\_\_\_ (*write in the number*) delegates from this list or among the eligible Brothers of the Province who have not been elected after the first round.

Place a cross in front of the name(s) you have chosen or in front of the name(s) that you add to the list.

**Reminder:** If there are more crosses than the number of Brothers to be elected, the ballot is void.

(The Provincial or Visitor writes below the names of the Brothers who obtained more than 10% of the votes in the first round)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

You may choose other Brothers:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3: Election of Delegates to the General Chapter 2024**

*Minutes of the SECOND ROUND*

(Two copies are sent to the Secretary General, and one by e-mail, for the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2023)

Province/District	
Place of vote counting	
Date	
Vote counting Commission	Brother Provincial/Visiteur :
	Bro
	Bro
	Bro

Number of voters		Number of delegates to elect		Ballots received	
Blank ballots		Void ballots		Valid ballots	
Absolute majority (Calculated from valid ballots)					

***Blank ballot:*** Nothing has been written on it.

***Void ballot:*** They are more crosses than the number of Brothers to elect or the ballot is illegible.

***Valid ballot:*** The number of chosen delegates is at least equal to the number of delegates to be elected.

**RESULTS OF THE VOTING PROCESS**

Reminder: Have been elected, after the first round :	
Names	Number of votes :

Have been elected delegates after the second round (The relative majority suffices)	
Names	Number of votes

Have been elected substitutes (Are substitutes, equal in number of delegates, the Brothers who come after the elected delegates in the order of the number of votes obtained)	
Names	Number of votes

*Signature of the members of the commission:*