



The General Council held its ordinary session from the 14th September to the 5th October, 2020 at the Casa Generalizia in Rome, during which the meeting of the Major Superiors of the Congregation took place. This meeting took place online given the health situation and the difficulty of travelling for most of the major Superiors. Beyond some technical difficulties, this meeting took place in a very fraternal atmosphere, and enabled the Superior General and his Council to better inform themselves of the situation of the Brothers and of the communities in the Provinces and Districts.

This issue of Echoes brings to the attention of the entire Congregation the topics that were discussed during this online meeting, as well as the information and decisions of this Council.

1. The animation of the Congregation

a. Echoes from Provinces and Districts :

Since February-March 2020, the members of the General Council have remained confined to the Casa due to the health crisis which has affected the whole world and which has suspended all intercontinental travel. The confinements and the impossibility of travelling, do not allow to have a precise view of the situation in the Provinces and Districts, especially as the situations may vary from one country to another in the same entity and that Major Superiors have long been stranded in their own country, or another. However, here are some echoes from the Provinces and Districts.

- **Tanzania-Kenya:** In Tanzania, establishments seem to function normally, as does Moshi's postulate. However, the border with Kenya remains closed to this day. The Brother Visitor was therefore unable to go to Tanzania. Schools in Kenya have yet to resume.
- **Uganda-South Sudan:** The country has been closed for many months, but Entebbe Airport has just been opened. During this period, the schools remained closed, with the economic problems that this entails for the pupils and the families, but also for the teachers, including the Brothers. The Novitiate and the Scholasticate were able to continue their mission of formation; and the Postulate, after a time of hiatus, once again welcomed its postulants. In South Sudan, the government reopened schools in September after 6 months of closure.
- **Congo-Rwanda:** In Rwanda, the Brother Visitor of the District stayed 5 months in Gisenyi, due to the pandemic. This resulted in a total cessation of activities and travel. A gradual return to schools is scheduled for October. In Congo DRC, the period was also marked by the closure of classes, but also by the continuing insecurity, especially in Ituri (Bunia). The authorities have decided to finish the current year before starting the new school year. For initial formation, the departure of Postulants for the Novitiate was delayed for a long time. On the 17th September, however, the Novitiate could begin in Dapaong with 6 Novices: four from Congo, one from Benin and one from Togo.

- **West Africa:** The District of Saint Paul went through a period of handover following the appointment of a new Brother Visitor, Br Jean-Baptiste NDIAYE. The school situation varies from country to country, but overall the tendency has been to resume classes to finish the school year before starting a new one. For formation, the Novitiate proceeded normally. After the first vows, the eight young professed Brothers were able to go to Abidjan. On the other hand, those from Haiti were unable to join the Scholasticate. And the two graduating Haitian Scholastics remain stranded in Abidjan.
- **Spain:** The Province was deeply affected by the death of 7 Brothers during the pandemic, as well as by the recent death of Brother Joaquín Blanco. The schools started again recently with differences according to the regions. All extra-curricular activities have been paralysed... with financial consequences. For the Brothers, during the Summer, a retreat was held in Nanclares with a small face-to-face group and one online. It was a good experience.
- **Cono Sur:** The South American continent has been severely affected by Covid 19. However, the situation has become more stable in recent weeks. In general, schools have not started face-to-face again. The "Mennaisian" week, which in the southern hemisphere takes place in September, was done through the Internet, like many other pastoral activities. In Bolivia, even if the international media do not talk about it much, the political and social situation remains unstable and worrying with clashes and deaths.
- **Canada-USA-Mexico:** Until now, the Province has gone through the health crisis with great care and precautions. Indeed, many brothers, especially those of the infirmary of La Prairie and Alfred (USA) have fragile health. The summer activities took place but with a reduced number of participants. Schools have started again in part via the Internet. The Congregation's website echoed the opening of the Postulate in Mexico City.
- **Asia:** Differences are to be noted between the 3 countries which form the District of Saint-François-Xavier. But travelling between these countries remains difficult, and until now, the Brother Visitor, after being confined for many weeks in Japan, is again blocked in Paris, unable to join his District. It seems that schools have resumed lessons thanks to the Internet. In Larantuka, the aspirants were able to start their 1st or 2nd year. Two Indonesians entered the novitiate in Yogyakarta. The Scholasticate of Manila continues its mission of formation with 4 Indonesian scholastics. The health situation made it impossible to continue with prospective visits for future missions.
- **France-England:** Schools reopened their doors in June, and all are operating at this new start of the school year, even if the evolution of contamination remains worrying in many European countries. The Province was also able to live its traditional feast day, last August 23 in Ploërmel, in the presence of 130 Brothers. It was a great occasion to celebrate the Jubilees and launch the New Year around the theme "Sowing Joy". On November 26 and 27, the Province will close the Bicentenary in Ploërmel.
- **Polynesia:** The new Brother Visitor, Br Yvon Deniaud recently shared with the General Council some significant events: the setting up and holding of the new District Council; a District recollection day, last September 17, as a memorial to the Auray retreat of 1820. Then a District Assembly brought together all the Brothers to reflect together on the most suitable structure for this presence in Polynesia. There was also the inauguration of the Lycée St-Athanase de Taiohae (Marquesas), a very beautiful ceremony in the presence of almost the entire government of Polynesia. As for Covid 19, French Polynesia was rather spared.

- **Haiti:** Schools have resumed, but at two speeds. Some are finishing the academic year while others have already started the new one. The Congregation's website echoed the first vows of the 2 novices on August 15, and the entry into the novitiate of 3 young people on August 14. On October 24, the Province will celebrate the final commitment of 3 Brothers. The country continues to experience a climate of insecurity linked to the upcoming elections.

b. Year Theme

- In most of the Provinces and Districts, at least those of the Northern Hemisphere, the year theme "**Sowing Joy**" was presented in view of the launch of the new year and the writing of the community project. This approach will be implemented in other sectors in the coming months. A second file for the animation of the Provinces or Districts will soon reach the Major Superiors

c. Closure of the Bicentenary

- The global health situation did not allow the official closing of the Bicentenary which was to be held in Uganda at the beginning of October 2020. Some Provinces or Districts have already recently celebrated this closing in their sector, or will schedule it in the coming months. Everyone is asked to echo it widely on the Congregation's website.
- The General Council postponed the official closure to next February in Kisubi, at the time of the Africa Conference. But it is currently impossible to know if these two events will be able to take place. Details will be provided shortly.

d. Formation to leadership

- The Union of Superiors General (USG) and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) have programmed an "on line" formation over 5 half-days next October and November, entitled "**Leaders for a consecrated life in a world during gestation**". Several major Superiors and other Brothers have registered.
- Currently it is no longer possible to register but you can find past interventions or follow live on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBlzthhOLVA>

e. Accompaniment of young Brothers

- During this session, the General Council met with **Brother Joseph Bellanger** in charge of accompanying young Brothers and the formation of Formators. Faced with the short- and medium-term impossibility of going there for training and meeting times with young Brothers, distance support continues. Many young Brothers returned with joy and fidelity to this exchange with Brother Joseph. Meetings by Zoom or other ways are under consideration.

f. Numerical Archives

- The General Council welcomed **Brother Claude Grégoire**, new Prosecutor near the Holy See, and Deputy Archivist, in charge of digital archives. This allowed the General Council to begin to put in place a precise protocol for this work of digitization and preservation of digital documents. The General Council also encourages the Provinces and Districts to establish archives of their sector, in "paper" version, but also in digital version and to transmit them to the General Secretariat.

g. Meeting of the Major Superiors online

- As planned from the 30th, September to the 3rd October, an online meeting of major Superiors took place. It was a first! And all the participants recognise the smooth running and « virtual » conviviality of this event, despite the small difficulties associated with this exercise but which have faded over the days.



- Three themes were discussed.

- **Mennaisian Family :**

The outcome of the "new Reference Text of the Mennaisian Family" and that of the "Statutes of the Association 'Lay Mennaisian Associates' " were at the centre of the discussions. From now on, we must encourage, support, and continue to train Brothers and Laity, prioritizing these four lines of action:

- Reception and appropriation of the new Reference Text,
- The creation and support of local Mennaisian groups,
- The establishment of the Provincial or District Commission, where it does not yet exist,
- The development of Mennaisian Lay Associates.

- **International Network of Mennaisian Centres :**

For several months, an International Commission has been in place. This is... in line with the call of the General Chapter 2018 - to make known the richness of our international Mennaisian network, to encourage the sharing of projects, and to work in a network. From now on, each Province or District must appoint one or more people whose mission is to act as a link between the Commission and the educational Centres.

- **Update of the Rule of Life**

The General Council raised the possibility of updating the Rule of Life at the next General Chapter 2024. Major Superiors were able to freely share their thoughts and views on this subject. Now the General Council will specify the objectives of this update and propose an approach.

- **Information time**

As mentioned in the previous Echoes, within the framework of the new missionary pages to be opened, Brother Gildas Prigent devoted time to the presentation of the prospective visit, made with Brother Stéphane Le Pape to **Timor Leste**. Following the meeting of the major Superiors, the General Council continues the discernment with a view to a missionary establishment in this country. He recommends that the whole Mennaisian Family carry this new missionary project in prayer.

Then each major superior presented his Province or District: news, issues, challenges and state of play on Covid 19.

Finally, the Superior General took stock of the latest publications of the Congregation (Circular 316, "Praying Mary with JMLM", "JMLM: notebook of a founder", new reference Text of the Mennaisian Family, and the future formations envisaged. : African conference and closing of the Bicentenary in Uganda (February 2021); European Conference (May 2021); formation of young Brothers and superiors of communities (summer 2021)

formation of Formators (September 2021). But the feasibility of all these meetings is linked to the evolution of the health situation.

h. Protocol Text of the Congregation on «The Child Protection »

- Last June, this protocol text reached the major Superiors. It takes up the directives of the Vatican and asks that in each Province or District:
 - a Commission for the Protection of Children is set up;
 - either drafted or updated the Protocol Text;
 - or appointed a contact person whose mission is to receive reports.

The report to the General Council is sent to the following address: protectionenfance@lamennais.org or communicated directly to the Superior General. This address is accessible on the Congregation's website from the "Contacts" tab.

i. Reference Text of the Mennaisian Family and the Statutes of the Association « Lay Mennaisian Associates »

- In July 2020, the CIVCSVA approved the Statutes of the Association "Lay Mennaisian Associates ". A new pamphlet "*Mennaisian Family*", which includes the *new reference Text of the Mennaisian Family and the Statutes of the Association "Lay Mennaisian Associates "* is currently in printing. The Provinces and Districts will receive it in a few weeks.

j. Charism application Guide

- The General Chapter had requested a **Guide to the application of the charism**. Translations into the 3 languages have been done. The original version is in Spanish. But the French and English texts have been revised and readjusted slightly. All of this offers a set of interesting materials that can help deepen our charism.
The proposals and tools presented in this Guide will be available on the Congregation's website under the "EDUCATION" tab.
Each Province or District is invited to use these tools in order to offer time of formation to Laity and Brothers, in order to better understand the charism of the Congregation.
The General Council thanks Bro. Porfirio Blanco for his work which made possible the completion of this educational guide.

2. Decisions of the Brother Superior General and his Council

a. Admissions to perpetual profession

The Brother Superior General with the consent of his Council has admitted to the perpetual profession:

Brothers **Ferdinand SOGLO and Philippe DOUTI**, respectively hailing from **Benin and Togo**, members of Saint-Paul District (Benin-Ivory Coast-Senegal-Togo)

Calendar of the members of the General Council

Due to the many uncertainties of intercontinental travel, it was impossible for the Brothers of the General Council to establish a calendar of visits for the coming months.

The next meetings of the General Council are:

- 2-5 February 2021 Africa Conference at Kisubi*****
- 7 February 2021 Closing of the Bicentenary Year at Kisubi*****
- 8-28 February 2021 General Council at Kisubi*****

**** if the health situation allows it.*