



Servants of Hope

General Chapter 2024

ECHOES from the General Council

Number 111 – September - October 2023

The General Council held its ordinary session from 18 September to 5 October 2023 at the Casa Generalizia in Rome. During this period, the Brothers of the Casa also shared in some of the Church's high points: the "Meeting Together" gathering, organised by the Taizé community, which brought together thousands of young people from all over the world to pray in St Peter's Square on the eve of the Synod. On this occasion, the Casa welcomed 5 young Europeans. The community also welcomed Cardinal Chibly Langlois, Bishop of Les Cayes, Haiti. He had come to take part in the Consistory on 30 September, during which Pope Francis created 21 new cardinals, and in the solemn opening of the Synod in St Peter's Square on Wednesday 4 October.

During the Council, an online meeting was held with the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family. After the Council, another four-day videoconference was held with the Major Superiors, focusing mainly on preparations for the next General Chapter.

This issue of Echoes brings to the attention of the entire Congregation the information and decisions taken at the General Council.

1. Animation of the Congregation

A. ECHOES FROM PROVINCES AND DISTRICTS:

Here are just a few of the trips we've made:

- **Brother Hervé Zamor:** The Superior General was in Haiti from 3 July to 15 August. After a period of rest with his family, he spent three weeks with the Brothers of the Province: visiting the novices, the communities in the metropolitan area and Jacmel, taking part in the annual retreat, talking about the Congregation and preparing for the next General Chapter, a day of formation for the Brothers in perpetual vows, the first vows of the three novices, the perpetual profession of Brother Marcsondez Desrivières and the entry into the novitiate of the three postulants. The Brothers are doing well, but they are still concerned about the persistence of the social, political and economic crisis that has been raging in the country for several years. The Superior General praised the Brothers' dedication to the mission and the commitment of the LAM (Lay Mennaisian Associates), who are increasingly taking charge of their own lives.
- **Brother Jean-Paul Peuzé:** the General Council was delighted to welcome Brother Jean-Paul. The Brother Assistant followed and encouraged the new Visitor of the District of Saint John Paul II. Present in Ploërmel, he was able to meet the Visitor of West Africa and the Provincial of Uganda and South Sudan, members of the team for the session of community superiors.

During a stay at the Generalate at the end of June/beginning of July, Brother Jean-Paul made the canonical visit to the Community of Sant'Ivo in Rome. The Italian Brothers are integrated into the community: they wholeheartedly carry out the various tasks entrusted to them: reception, archives, postulation of the cause, helping students to learn Italian The Congregation appreciates them for all these services.

- **Brother Vincent Ssekate:** After the Council of May-June, Brother Vincent joined the Province of Tanzania-Kenya, for which he is responsible as Major Superior, and he visited, among others, the communities of Moshi and Dar-es-Salaam. He then took part in a session organised by the Brother Treasurer General and Madaleine Trillard, member of FIC-Expertise on new accounting tools.

After this session, Brother Vincent returned to France to take part in the animation of the Session for Community Superiors, at the Lycée La Touche in Ploërmel, then went to Abidjan (Ivory Coast) for the Formation Session for Brother Formators.

- **Brother Miguel Aristondo:** The visit to the USA scheduled for last June had to be postponed due to a health problem that required him to spend some time in hospital. The visit has been postponed until November and December. Before the retreat for the Brothers of the Province, Brother Miguel presented to the Brothers and lay people of Spain the activities planned by the General Council on the road to the General Chapter.

With Brother Hervé Zamor and Brother Vincent Ssekate of the General Council, he took part in the animation of the Formators' session in Abidjan.

B. FORMATION :

1. Superiors of Community

Despite the rather chilly weather, this session was unanimously appreciated and enjoyed by the 16 Brothers taking part in the session, the 5 members of the leadership team and the 2 translators. The great internationality of the participants (11 different nationalities representing 22 countries) was very enriching. The fraternal atmosphere of the session, of the exchanges and sharing, was of the highest quality. Everyone was able to overcome the language barrier and reach out to others. The various encounters during the session brought a "breath of fresh air" and allowed us to open up to the whole of the Mennaisian Family: the groups of young people present at the camp on the La Touche site, the Brothers from the Mother House and from Josselin, Bleuenn Gautier (Estival, Institut Mennaisien de Formation), Alain Caillon (ASSIFIC), Brother Yannick and other Brothers passing through.

2. Formators of Brothers at Abidjan

Fourteen of the fifteen future or current trainers who took part in the first session in 2022 met again in Abidjan for this second session. In terms of organisation, fraternal and spiritual life, teaching methods and methodology, everyone appreciated the quality of this 2nd session. All that remains now is to implement the guidelines and lines of action adopted for the themes: deepening the experience of prayer; the Rule of Life: guide and object of formation; personal accompaniment and spiritual growth. A booklet bringing together everything that has been said during these two years of formation is currently being prepared. It will serve as a guide for all the Institute's formators.

3. Tutti Fratelli Session: Formation of accompaniers for young Brothers

Brothers **Gildas Prigent** and **Gerard Byaruhanga** took part in this session, which took place in Rome from 9 September to 6 October. There were around 55 participants from 14 congregations of Brothers. Representatives from Africa and Asia made up two thirds of the participants. The experience and sharing of this session were enriched by the great internationality and interculturality of the Brothers present. A quality session: the challenge is to put it into practice on the ground.

c. GENERAL CHAPTER 2024

1. Theme of the Year and of the General Chapter 2024

Following receipt of Circular No. 319 from the Superior General, the communities have begun the seven-stage preparation of our next General Chapter, on the theme Servants of Hope. The feedback from the various sectors will be used to draft the "**Instrumentum Laboris**" of the General Chapter. In this preparation, each Major Superior has a double mission: to encourage the Brothers and communities to take part in this Congregational process, and to respect the timetable for sending the contributions of his sector to the General Secretariat. The first contribution is due at the end of October, the 2nd at the end of December, the 3rd at the end of February and the last on 15 March 2024.

In circular N° 320, the Superior General has already communicated the official list of the **Capitulants** of the next Chapter, their **substitutes**, and those **invited**: the **6 lay people** of the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family who will be present during the first week of the Chapter and **6 young Brothers** who will participate in the whole Chapter. This new circular has been sent out as a pdf document. The Major Superiors should forward it to all the communities. It is also available on the Congregation's website.

The Board devoted a great deal of time to preparing for the next Chapter: **the calendar** and all the **practical and organisational aspects**. There was a progress report on the **updating of the Rule of Life**. The Vademecum, which will serve as a guide for the adoption of the new text of the Rule of Life by the capitulants, was finalised. The Superior General presented a first draft of his report on the state of the Congregation. The methodology for drafting the **Instrumentum Laboris** based on contributions from the Provinces and Districts was clarified.

The Superior General has already sent the capitulants and guests their **official letter of convocation**. Online work sessions with the capitulants have been agreed. The aim is to help them familiarise themselves with the new text of the Rule of Life. A further letter will be sent to them in December to explain other practical points.

Pope Francis will receive the capitulants in private audience on the morning of Monday 22 April 2024. At the end of the Chapter, on 24 April, the Brother Superior General **will renew the Institute's Consecration to Mary** in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The first consecration to Mary took place on 25 March 1943 in Ploërmel, under the tenure of Brother Etienne Barbier, and was renewed on 25 March 1988 in Rome by Brother Bernard Gaudeul.

2. Online meeting of the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family

An online meeting was held on 20 September with members of the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family.

Other meetings will take place between now and the Chapter. The aim of these meetings is twofold: -

- 1) To propose a new way of structuring and animating the Mennaisian Family.
- 2) To discern orientations and lines of action for the next 6 years.

3. Online meeting of Major Superiors

This meeting took place from **9 to 11 and on 13 October 2023**. Four themes were on the agenda.

- **Theme 1: Missionaries of hope today**. Based on a catechesis by Pope Francis, the Superior General had invited each Major Superior and their Council to identify:

- a) two or three realities that bear witness to the fact that the Brothers and lay people of the Mennaisian Family in their sector are missionaries of hope;
- b) two or three calls to conversion;
- c) two or three gestures of personal or community conversion.

After a time of mutual listening and silence, each Major Superior discerned the most urgent call to conversion and two lines of action to respond to it. The fruits of this sharing will constitute the contributions of the Major Superiors to the writing of the ***Instrumentum Laboris for the Chapter***.

- ***Theme 2: Updating the Rule of Life***: Brother Jean-Paul presented the current status of the revision of the Rule of Life. He then presented the ***Vade-Mecum*** prepared by the General Council with a view to working on the Rule of Life during our Chapter. Finally, he proposed a method for the ***capitulants to work on the Rule of Life before the Chapter***, so that everyone can grasp the texts and enter into the spirit of the updating of the Rule of Life that is underway.

- ***Theme 3: Financing of the general administration***: This theme addressed concrete, even technical questions, but necessary to arrive at the Chapter with clear proposals on which the capitulants will have to reflect and decide, concerning the future of the ***Casa Generalizia*** in Rome and the ***financing of the general administration***. The discussions highlighted the complexity of the choices to be made, and the importance of not putting off indefinitely decisions that must be taken to guarantee the animation of the Congregation.

- ***Theme 4: Mennaisian Family, its challenges of organisation and animation***: After the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family, the Major Superiors took the time to address the challenges of organisation and animation of the Mennaisian Family. From these exchanges emerged the call to strengthen and accompany the ***Provincial and District Commissions*** and above all, to ***encourage and support local groups***.

2. Information

A. Accounts of the Congregation

The General Council met with the Treasurer General and Mr Yves Delarra, President of the accounting firm that supports the Institute's General Treasurer.

The accounting information for the past year has almost all been received by the General Treasurer. This has enabled a ***consolidated presentation of the Congregation's accounts***. An inventory of properties, investments and other information is also underway. The aim is to have as accurate a picture as possible of the patrimony, which should enable the General Chapter to vote on important orientations for the future of the Congregation.

On the proposal of the General Treasurer and the Council for Economic Affairs (CAE), the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, approved the ***provisional budget*** for the coming year, and the ***readvances*** (contributions) of the Provinces and Districts.

After more than two years of negotiations, ***the Castel Gandolfo*** property has been sold. The sale of the ***Sant'Ivo school*** site is also well underway. We hope to conclude this process by the end of 2023.

B. Communication

The General Council had an online meeting with Michel Tanguy, on all matters relating to information in the Congregation. Together, they took stock of our print and digital publications. La Mennais Click Info No. 7 was sent out recently. **The annual album La Mennais Magazine No. 49 will be published in November-December 2023. A Directory of FIC communities and works around the world, from their origins to the present day, is still in progress.**

150 **statuettes of Jean-Marie de la Mennais** (25 cm high) that were ordered by the Districts and Provinces will be available at the time of the General Chapter.

The General Council will provide details of how these statuettes will be transported to the Chapter at the appropriate time.

C. Update on two texts of the Congregation

1) Following the publication of a new version of the Motu Proprio "VOS ESTIS LUX MUNDI" in March 2023, the General Council has re-read the "Child Protection" text. The updated Protocol will be available on the Congregation's website. All sectors of the Congregation are encouraged to adapt their own protocol.

2) The "**Vade Mecum**" for Major Superiors has also been updated, following the various Motu Proprio: "VOS ESTIS LUX MUNDI" (concerning sexual abuse) and "COMMUNIS VITA" modifying the modalities of ipso facto dismissal of members of a Congregation.

D. Other pieces of information

1) Brother Wilfried FARA (Abidjan Scholasticate) brilliantly defended his doctoral thesis on October 12, entitled: "**The Trinity as a hermeneutical key in the anthropology of H.U. Balthasar and J. Moltmann**". The General Council and all those who worked with him at the Gregorian University congratulate him and wish him every success in continuing his mission in the service of the Congregation.

2) A meeting between Brother Stéphane Le Pape and **Mgr Léandro Maria Alves, the new Bishop of Baucau (Timor Leste)** took place on 18 October. Let's keep this new missionary project of the Congregation in our prayers.

3) The year 2024 is the **200th anniversary of the arrival of the Brothers at the Mother House** in Ploërmel. Father de la Mennais arrived there in November 1824. The Province of Saint-Jean-Baptiste will be sure to let us know about the events marking this anniversary. They will take place between September 2024 and the summer of 2025.

The **New Motherhouse Visitors Centre**, which is currently undergoing major renovations, will be inaugurated on **16 March 2024**.

4) Session of preparation for perpetual vows: During the **summer of 2024, from 13 July to 13 August**, a session is planned for **young Brothers preparing for perpetual vows**.

3. Decisions of Brother Superior General and his Council

A. Nominations

Brother Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has appointed:

- **Brother Delefino MUHINDO**, Master of Novices at the Kasasa Novitiate, for a term of three years beginning with the year 2024.

B. Admission to the Perpetual Vows

Brother Superior General, with the consent of his Council, has admitted to perpetual profession Brothers **Étienne FAYE** and **Gaston KOUMBOUM**, from Senegal and Togo respectively.

4. Calendrier des membres du Conseil Général

Brother Hervé ZAMOR:

2 November – 2 December	Uganda
3 December – 5 January	Rome
5 January – 5 February	Uganda
12 February	Rome – General Council

Brother Jean-Paul PEUZE:

October – December	Rome
9 January – 23 January	Break at Nantes
12 February	Rome – General Council

Brother Vincent SSEKATE:

14 November – 27 November	Polynesia (Tahiti)
29 November – 5 December	Rome
5 December – 8 February	Kenya-Tanzania
12 February	Rome – General Council

Brother Miguel ARISTONDO:

6 November – 10 November	Session in Rome on Child Protection, organised by the Unions of Superiors General (USG/UISG)
14 November	Spain
25 November – 10 December	USA, Canada
11 December	Spain
31 January	Rome
12 February	Rome – General Council

**The next session of the General Council will take place
12 February to 1 March 2024 in Rome.**