



LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,

At the beginning of Lent, I am happy to greet you and I hope that my letter finds you in good health. I give thanks to the Lord for all the good and beautiful things that are happening in our great Mennaisian Family, especially for the session that brought together 25 Brothers and Lay people at Kisubi, Uganda, for the launch of a two-year formation programme. In this letter, I would like to introduce you to an important event that we will experience next year: the General Chapter.



Servants of hope!

This is the theme chosen for the preparation of our next General Chapter, which will take place in Ariccia, in the heights of Castel Gandolfo (Italy), from 26 March to 24 April 2024.

"But, Brother Hervé, what is a General Chapter?"

It is an international meeting which brings together Brothers from all the Districts and Provinces of the Congregation every six years. Its mission is to elect the Superior General and the Brother Assistants, to define the lines of action for the next six years and to adapt the structures and activities of the Institute to its proper purpose according to the needs of the time.

The General Chapter has full authority to deal with all matters relating to the life of the Congregation and the Mennaisian Family.

"Is this the first one?"

It was on 4 August 1869 that the professed Brothers meeting in Ploërmel decided to endow the Institute with a General Chapter. It is a decision that dates from that time. In 2024, it will be 155 years. It will be the 28th General Chapter. It is beautiful to celebrate a Chapter because it enrolls us, like a family, in a line of descent. We receive an inheritance that we are called to keep, to enrich and to pass on. Thus, we become heirs, builders and transmitters of this inheritance.



"Who is involved?"

Three categories of people take part. First of all, the members by right, that is to say, those who are not elected, namely: the Superior General and the Brother Assistants, the former Superior General following the previous six years of this mandate, the Provincials and the Visitors. Secondly, the elected members who come from the various sectors of the Congregation: they must be more numerous than those by right. Finally, the invited members. For example, the members of the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family were invited to participate in the first week of the 2018 General Chapter. In addition to these participants, the Brothers Secretary General, Treasurer General and Procurator to the Holy See were also invited.

"Why a whole month?"

This time the Chapter will be a little longer. Yes, almost a whole month. But that passes so quickly. In order to understand the length, perhaps we should approach it from the content. In general, it begins with three days of retreat, which already sets the tone and the colour. In fact, it is a question of listening to each other and for all, to listen to the Holy Spirit. Then the Superior General presents the Congregation to the Capitulants, the Major Superiors, their Province or District and the Brother Treasurer General, the financial status. This is followed by the work of the Chapter, which alternates between workshops and plenary assemblies. Finally, a time is devoted to elections.

All this takes place to the rhythm of an intense spiritual life: Lauds, meditation, Eucharist, Vespers, adoration and a fraternity with the colours as of the rainbow and respect for the rich diversity of our cultures.

In the context of the next General Chapter, it is planned to update our Rule of Life. This work will take up a large part of the agenda.

"Why the choice of the theme "Servants of Hope"?"

There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, it is the fruit of the discernment of the Major Superiors who met in Rome at the General Conference from 26 September to 4 October 2022. After having reread the Chapters of the Provinces and Districts and the last General Chapter, on the one hand, and in the face of the health, economic and ecological crises and the worrying armed conflicts which are shaking our world, on the other hand, we felt a strong call to be *Servants of Hope* in our different environments. Then, read and meditated on in the light of the Wedding Feast at Cana (Jn 2, 1-11), this theme reminds us that the Lord is ready to answer our calls of distress if we cry out to Him with faith and hope. Then, the Church, through the voice of Pope Francis, asks us to keep the flame of hope burning 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". Finally, by putting ourselves in the school of Mary, Servant of Hope, we will learn that only her Son Jesus can transform the "water" in our jars "into good wine" for our greatest joy and that of all humanity..



"Are the Lay members of the Mennaisian Family concerned by the General Chapter of the Brothers?"

As in a family, the Laity are invited to prepare this important moment of the Institute with the Brothers. It is a good opportunity to re-read together the journey travelled since the last General Chapter. The members of the International Family Commission as well as the members of the Province and District Commissions are invited to take part in this process of rereading². Our family needs every little stone to build our common house. None is useless. Every grain of sand contributes to making it more beautiful. Let us not miss this favourable moment to learn to fill our jars together. This is where the Lord is waiting for us to change our "water" into "good wine".

"How to participate in the preparation of the next General Chapter?"

- By being servants of hope: Like Saint Francis of Assisi, where there is sadness, let us sow joy. Where there is darkness, let us bring light. Where lies flourish, let truth flourish. Where there is hatred and discord, let us sow love.
- By actively participating in the seven steps proposed in Circular 319 by Brother Hervé Zamor: In case you don't have it, it is available on the website of the Congregation (www.lamennais.org).
- By praying: Let us pray personally and let our students, family members, colleagues ... pray for the success of the next General Chapter with the prayer below or any other that is most convenient...

Prayer in preparation for the 2024 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 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 following their Master.

God alone in time! God alone in eternity! **Amen!**

Br Hervé Zamor, s.g.

¹ Pope Francis, Letter to Mgr Rino Fisichella, 11 February 2022.

² See the letter and questionnaire sent by Brother Aristondo to the members of the International Family Commission and the Province or District Commissions on 4 March 2023.