

MENNAISIAN NOVENA

March 2019

Jean-Marie, Gabriel and the children

The work of Jean-Marie and Gabriel Deshayes was a clear and unique project: the evangelization of children and young people through education. A work that has developed over time and diversified at the pedagogical and educational levels, but which has always and everywhere been linked to new generations. Why this unequivocal and constant choice, in a society that needs to diversify pastoral approaches? Would the school - and education in general - be an area outside the mission and life of the Church?

To answer this question, let us go back to the gospel. The children, marginalized and considered passive in the society of their time, were in fact Jesus' great friends. *"Let the little children come to me and do not stop them"* (this sentence is written in large print in many of our schools). The children were the models of the disciples of the Reign of the Father. *"If you do not become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."*

The children were the most receptive disciples of Jesus: *"I thank you, Father, for hiding these mysteries from the wise and the learned and to have revealed them to the little ones"*. The children are at the center of the Gospel and the work of Jesus: *"Jesus took a child and placed him in their midst."*

With children - and young people - we find ourselves at the heart of the gospel. It may be a simple ministry, not very visible, not of "great importance", but it is an authentically evangelical work. A work that requires a lot of patience, endurance, tenacity and determination; a work that requires one to always start again, with interlocutors who need gentleness and firmness, support and encouragement, dynamism, but also ready to be corrected, a work that requires one's presence and a sharing of joys and weaknesses, which absorbs all the energies of the educators, their imagination, their creativity, which is recognized by a few, and which the children themselves ignore. Or as a former Superior General, Brother Bernard Gaudeul, wrote: *"We are rather obscure workers who work on the foundations of the building"* (Circ.270, 35)

Is this work really relevant? Jean-Marie and Gabriel considered it the most important and the most urgent for their time. And today? It's exactly the same thing. Faced with today's educational urgency, Pope Benedict XVI has sounded an alarm. Pope Francis strongly wanted a synod for young people and their presence in the Church and in the world. The Brothers and Sisters of the Mennaisian and Deshayesian congregations, possess the spirit, the means, the traditions, the sources of Providence to renew today the mission among the children and the young people.