



# L'Écho Montfortain

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## A WORD FROM FATHER GENERAL

### A VISIT TO BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA

This October for the first time I finally got to visit the confreres in Brazil and Argentina. It is difficult to imagine the size of these vast countries that take up a good part of the South American continent. Together they cover 11,288,655 km<sup>2</sup>; that is a surface 37 times greater than Italy and 20 times larger than France! In Brazil the first places I visited were in the state of Minas Gerais, where for hour after hour one travels through gentle green hills. There is farming but the greatest industry is mining, some of which dates back to Portuguese colonial times. A witness to those former days in Minas Gerais is found in the extraordinary churches of certain towns, colonial baroque masterpieces with altars, statues and even ceilings all in gold. However our confreres witness to another aspect of Brazilian life. Since the first Dutch confreres arrived in Brazil in 1967, they focused their attention on poor *favelas* and *barrios*. Instead of churches made of silver and gold, the confreres sought to encourage the Christians themselves to be living stones which together would build up God's temple.

In the city of João Monlevade three confreres work together to accomplish a variety of activities. The vocation and formation ministries are centred here, with five postulants now studying philosophy at the local seminary. With energy and creativity the community has translated, published and diffused most of Montfort's writings throughout Brazil. Our parish here is named São Luis Marie de Montfort but rather than settle for a single large parish church, the confreres accompany some 16 communities that meet in modest chapels. In the pastoral practice of the Brazilian church each of these 16 communities is composed of many basic Christian communities which engage hundreds of people in a staggering variety of ministries and services – from baptism preparation, groups for children, teenagers, families, health needs, St. Vincent de Paul to liturgy preparation, prayer groups and ministry to the bereaved.

I have participated in the Eucharist in dozens of countries but never had I experienced anything quite like Sunday celebrations in Brazil, the culmination of all the small groups' active collaboration, their struggle for life, food and shelter, their thanksgiving to God. Someone said that the Eucharist in Brazil was like dancing the samba – and it is quite true! The crowded celebrations vibrate with song, dance, clapping, dialogue homilies and dramatic presentations. A simple example that struck me: whereas in most places the priest alone opens the celebration with a subdued, "In the name of the Father..." here as the entire Sunday Assembly slowly makes the sign of the cross, hundreds of people together sing, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," – and then extending their hands toward their fellow Christians around them, they add "We are gathered here." They repeat that two or three times, powerfully helping each one to remember why and how they have come together. The people's faith is founded on the Word and put into practice with active service that helps them grow in communion. An impressive example: since 1993 two hundred and forty simple houses

have been constructed with the help of the parish and the joint labour of those families who will move from their tin shacks into the new houses.

The capital of the state of Minas Gerais is Belo Horizonte, the third largest city in Brazil and a beautiful, bustling metropolis of some 5 million people. We paid a visit to Dom Serafim Fernandes de Araújo, Cardinal Archbishop of Belo Horizonte, who holds as his titular church in Rome our own SMM parish of St. Luigi de Montfort in Monte Mario. His intelligence, simplicity and holiness make him a great support for his archdiocese, and he is a warm friend and father to our parishioners in Rome.

The entire Montfortian Family is present in Brazil, and they try to work together with groups of lay people interested in going deeper into the heart of Montfortian spirituality. I visited the Brothers of St. Gabriel in their community at Nova Contagem, on the far outskirts of Belo Horizonte. Here a few brothers have begun a small, unpretentious program in a few rooms to help high school dropouts and other adults move back into studies and work skills. Their very presence has changed a once violent and drug-ridden neighbourhood into one of peace and hope. On the road to São Paulo I was able to visit the Brothers large institute at Passos that provides remarkable remedial and support activities for poor street children. In São Paulo the Daughters of Wisdom are still deeply engaged in projects for the very poor children of the *favelas* and their families. Among the two-year-old pre-schoolers, my white beard proved fascinating and wonderful to tug on!

São Paulo is a sprawling metropolis of more than 20 million, and here the Dutch confreres have been working for decades, sharing the life of the people in the poor *favelas*. Once again the pastoral practice is based on small ecclesial communities, but this time in the context of a huge city with all its accompanying vices and challenges. The commitment of the confreres and the Christians over so many years is impressive. One particular need that arose was the many children born HIV-positive or dying from AIDS. Over time one of the confreres, Br. Antonio van Noye, with the help of collaborators from Brazil, Holland and elsewhere has developed a marvellous residential centre –Sitio Agar – for about fifty of these children at a time, from a few months old to teenage. One of the great proofs of its success is that over the past two years not one of the children has died of Aids.

In January the formation community and the confreres in João Monlevade will formally become part of the Italian provincial delegation of Peru. Looking toward the future, the aim of the new Delegation of Peru-Brazil will be to unify and strengthen personnel and resources for the Montfortian future in Latin America.

From São Paulo I travelled to Buenos Aires for a short visit to the five French confreres working there. The SMM mission in Argentina was founded in 1966. Like our other Latin American mission entities, it was a response to Pope John XXIII's plea for renewed missionary activity in Latin America. The confreres set to work in the Diocese of Lomas de Zamora, in an extremely poor *barrio* on the outskirts of Buenos Aires crammed with cardboard and tin shacks. With time longer residents have improved their homes but newer ones are still making do with almost nothing. These are still *barrios* for missionary work; rare is the Diocesan priest who would choose to go there.

Even as I write this in December, the economic crisis in Argentina is worsening. Such a vast and rich country has been crippled by extraordinary debt obligations to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank; the injustices and inequalities of these measures are brutally felt by the poor. But also the cumulative effects of massive governmental corruption on all levels – especially at the highest levels – creates a cynical, cruel bottomless pit where millions of funds necessary for public health, housing, roads and infrastructures disappear into private accounts. Add to this a concerted effort by the Drug Traffickers to addict even the poorest neighbourhoods with drugs, which has brought about an insidious new criminality of 10 year old boys who rob and kill without remorse, completely overtaken by the need for the drugs. It is indeed a depressing and frightening situation. However in the middle of all this is something extraordinary...

The parishes and small Christian communities, youth groups, scouts, catechists, parents' groups – dozens of courageous and faith-filled groups continue to work day after day to protect and build up the human, civil and Christian life of the barrios.

To walk out after dark is very dangerous due to the robbing drug addicts, yet night after night people of our parishes come together for prayer or study or discussion. The Eucharistic celebrations are full with Christians who bring the entire situation of their daily life and struggles to the Word and Bread of God. An intriguing new development: various persons of all ages have discovered the power and beauty of the spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort. They do not see it as some optional filigree to their piety, but as a shining new light on the radicality of their baptismal commitment to Jesus through Mary. I was quite moved to meet a large group of young people of the parish who were preparing – for 30 consecutive evenings, precisely under those dangerous conditions of the streets – to make the Consecration to Jesus Wisdom on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

I thank the Lord for this long-awaited visit to the Montfortian Family in Brazil and Argentina. A long history of zealous missionary activity lived in the greatest proximity with the poor, sharing intimately their lives and struggles – this continues on today. With the added fire of renewed interest in our Montfortian spirituality, may God continue to incarnate the Good News of his Love.

*William Considine, smm*  
*Superior General*

## OFFICIAL NEWS ITEMS

### PERPETUAL PROFESSIONS

The following confreres made their Perpetual Profession of Vows in the Company of Mary:

On 8 December 2001, in Ecuador, **Brother Manuel de Jesús BAJAÑA VEGA**.

On 8 December 2001, in Tamatave, Madagascar, **Didier Célestin RASATAMADINIVOLA, Kiki Bruno RANDRIANASOLO, Jean-Baptiste RALIVANIRINA, Hary André RAKOTOSON, Alexandre RANDRIAMIHARISOA** and **Séraphin-Marie RAZAFISOANIAINA**.

On 15 December 2001, in Nantipwili, Malawi, **Oscar SAGWANTI**, and in Kisangani (Congo), **Jean de Dieu EKANGA MBULA**.

### ORDINATIONS TO THE DEACONATE

On 9 December 2001, in Madagascar, **Didier Célestin RASATAMADINIVOLA, Kiki Bruno RANDRIANASOLO, Jean-Baptiste RALIVANIRINA, Hary André RAKOTOSON, Alexandre RANDRIAMIHARISOA** and **Séraphin-Marie RAZAFISOANIAINA** were ordained deacon.

On 16 December, in Malawi, **Oscar SAGWANTI** was ordained deacon, and in Kisangani (Congo), **Jean de Dieu EKANGA MBULA**.

### ORDINATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD

On 15 November 2001, in Venoor, India, **Robert Jerald REGO** was ordained to the priesthood.

On 2 December 2001, in Port-au-Price, Haiti, **Jean-Jacques SAINT-LOUIS** and **Marcel Maxime SOLIDE** were ordained to the priesthood.

### CHANGE OF STATUS AND NEW SUPERIOR IN GERMANY

On 11 December 2001, the status of the Province of Germany was changed to that of Vice-Province, upon the request, approved by the General Council, of the Province itself. The same day, at a special Assembly of the Vice-Province, attended by Father General and Assistant Fr. Hub Louis, **Fr. Edmund JÄCKEL** was elected Superior of the Vice-Province for a term of six (6) years. Also elected

were two Councillors, Frs. Bernhard GEHRMANN and Hermann-Josef JÜNEMANN. The elections were immediately confirmed by Father General.

## CHANGE OF STATUS IN BRAZIL

At the request of the Provincial Superiors of the Netherlands and of Italy, and acting on the advice of the Extraordinary General Council of October 2000, the General Council has created the new Italian Provincial Delegation of Peru-Brazil comprising the former Delegation of Peru, together with the apostolic and formation community of João Monlevade in Brazil, and all future foundations that might be made and members who might enter the Company of Mary in Brazil. The few remaining Dutch confreres in São Paulo, Brazil, will henceforth constitute a local community of the Dutch Province. The new arrangement comes into force on 1 January 2002.

## COMINGS AND GOINGS AT THE GENERAL HOUSE

2001 has been a very busy year for the members of the General Council, who have visited many different entities during the course of the year.

**Father General** began the year in the *United States*, where he took a much-needed rest and had various medical examinations. After visiting Haiti and Nicaragua, accompanied by Fr. Patiño, he returned to Rome on 29 January in time for the meeting of the Formation Personnel which took place at the Via Prenestina in Rome from 4 to 25 February. He gave a number of conferences during this meeting. On 22 April he left for *Nairobi* for a visit to the General Delegation for Formation in Africa, which, on 1 May, was enlarged and became the General Delegation of Africa, as reported in the *Écho* no. 507 (June, 2001). During the course of his visit Father General attended the celebrations in *Malawi* of 100 years of the presence of the Montfortians in that country, and he also visited the Novitiate of the African Delegation in Mabarara, *Uganda*, before returning to Rome on 9 May. At the end of May, he visited the Province of *Germany* with Fr. Hub Louis, in preparation for that Province's change of status to Vice-Province. At the end of June, he was in the *Netherlands*, attending a celebration there of the 100 years of the Montfortian presence in Malawi, for former missionaries and collaborators. Most of the months of July, August and September was spent in the General House, as temporary *factotum*, in the absence of the rest of the Council. In August he visited *Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre* for a Congress organised for the laity on Montfortian Spirituality (4-11 August). In September he went to *England* to preach the Provincial Retreat for the Province of Gt. Britain and Ireland (16-24 September). On 12 October, he left for the USA, from where he began a visit to various countries in South America: *Brazil, Argentina and Colombia*. He returned to the General House in time for the meeting of the General Finance Committee on 19 November. On 8 December, he went to *Zagreb*, Croatia, for the inauguration of the first canonical community there, before continuing on to *Germany* for the change of status of the German Province and the election of a new Superior on 11 December. He returned to Rome on 14 December. Early in January 2002 he will attend the Chapter of Elections in Haiti (7-14 January).

**Fr. Ivo LIBRALATO** was responsible for the organisation of the meeting of Formation Personnel in Rome in February. In May, he visited *Portugal* with Brother Hervé, returning to Rome after the celebrations of 15 May. On 6 July he left for *Peru*, in the company of the Italian Provincial. While in Peru he preached two retreats and attended various assemblies. He returned to Rome on 30 July. From 9 October to 7 November, he was in *Madagascar*, where he gave a course in preparation for final vows to the 6 candidates for Perpetual Profession there.

**Fr. Hub LOUIS** began the year in *Belgium*, where he visited most of the communities and confreres, returning to Rome on 19 January. He accompanied Father General to *Germany* at the end of May. Then, on 15 July, he began a journey which would take him to the *Netherlands* (for a holiday), then on to the *Philippines* (15 August), where he attended a meeting of the Superiors of the Asian delegations, as well as visiting our mission in Cebu, and *Indonesia* (25 August), where he spent the month of September in visiting the Montfortian residences in Java, Sintang and Flores, before returning to Rome on 1 October. On 8 December he left for *Germany*, where he accompanied Father General for

the inauguration of the Vice-Province of Germany, before returning to the *Netherlands*, where he will continue his visits to the various communities and confreres until returning to Rome in January 2002.

**Fr. Jean-Louis COURCHESNE** took a short break in Canada in January, returning to act as secretary for the meeting of Formation Personnel in Rome in February. Following this, he was advised by his doctors to take a prolonged leave of absence from his duties as an Assistant, and in mid-March he returned to Canada, where he spent the rest of the year. In January 2002 he will return to full activity at the General House.

**Fr. Miguel PATIÑO** began the year in *Miami (USA)*, from where he also visited Haiti, Nicaragua and Guatemala. He returned to Rome on 4 February. Later in the year, starting on 1 July, he visited *Argentina*, where he attended two meetings of lay people following the way of St. Louis Marie, as reported in the *Écho* no. 508 (October 2001). From there he went to *Colombia*, where he met with most of the confreres and was involved in the planning of future formations sessions for Latin America. He returned to Rome on 14 September. On 22 November, Fr. Miguel returned to *Colombia*, where he was due to preach the Provincial Retreats. He will return to Rome on 17 January 2002.

During the course of 2001, there have been a number of **visitors to the General House**, including relations of Fr. General and Fr. Allerton, some of the confreres (Fr. Majella BENOIT from Canada with his sister and brother-in-law; Fr. Jef MARTENS from Belgium with Mme. Nic Slaus – the co-ordinator of the “Carrefour” in Banneux, Belgium; Fr. Gérard LEMIRE from Canada; Fr. Jean MORINAY from France, preaching a retreat for the Daughters of Wisdom; Mgr. GAYOT and Mgr. COLIMON, from Haiti, in Rome for *ad limina* visits; Mgr. Gérard DESCHAMPS, Bishop of Bereina in Papua New Guinea, in Rome for the Synod of Bishops in October; most of the Formation Personnel attending the meeting in February; and Frs. Piet GOLTSTEIN, Gerd EUTENEUER and Matt CONSIDINE, members of the General Finance Committee, which met in Rome twice during the year – on the second occasion, Mrs Mia Rummens, secretary of the Belgian Province, accompanied Fr. Goltstein), and some Indian friends of Fr. Raja Telagthothi, in Europe for some academic conferences. 2001 also saw the arrival of Brother Philip ABRANCHES of the Canadian Province and Fr. Francesco AGLIARDI of the Italian Province, to take up residence in the General House.

Since the beginning of November, we finally have a full-time secretary at the Generalate: Cristina Lazzarini, a Roman university graduate, who speaks Italian, English, French and Russian!

## OUR DEPARTED BRETHREN

### Fr. Donald MACDONALD

Died on 23 November 2001, in Stirling (Scotland), aged 67 with 46 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1955, and was ordained a priest on 25 February 1961. Most of his priestly life was spent as a preacher of missions and especially retreats. But he was also widely known in the English-speaking world for his articles in a number of Catholic reviews. He made himself available to the wider needs of the Congregation when he was appointed Novice-master in India, then later in the Philippines. For the past few years he was a valued member of the Provincial Council in the Province of Gt. Britain & Ireland.

### Fr. Guillaume (Giel) MEELS

Died on 23 November 2001, in Valkenburg (Netherlands), aged 86 with 66 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1935, and was ordained a priest on 23 March 1941. He had to wait five years, because of the War, before he could obtain his wish and go to the mission-field. He spent 30 years as a missionary in Mozambique and three years in Brazil. In his later years he was Rector in a home for the elderly in the Netherlands, where he also used the press to express his deep convictions and his loyalty to the Pope. For this he was awarded the Papal medal “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” in 1995.

### Brief note on the Statistics (next page)

It may be too early to “put out the flags”, but it may be noted that, for the first time in many years (indeed since 1968), the **total number in the Congregation, instead of falling, has this year risen slightly** – from 973 at 31 December 2000 to 978 at 31 December 2001.

## STATISTICS – DEC 31 2001

<b>By "Appartenance / Juridical Entity"</b>				
	<b>Priests</b>	<b>Brothers</b>	<b>Scholastics</b>	<b>Total</b>
Allemagne	21	1	0	22
Belgique	34	5	0	39
Canada	52	19	0	71
Colombie	50	6	6	62
États-Unis	29	3	2	34
France	118	35	0	153
Généralat	59	6	65	130
GB&I	29	6	0	35
Haiti	35	1	16	52
Italie	172	17	12	201
Pays-Bas	116	26	37	179
	<b>715</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>978</b>

<b>By "Lieu de Travail / Country of work"</b>				
	<b>Priests</b>	<b>Brothers</b>	<b>Scholastics</b>	<b>Total</b>
Allemagne	25	1	0	26
Angleterre	19	4	0	23
Argentine	4	1	0	5
Australie	0	0	0	0
Autriche	2	0	0	2
Bahamas	1	0	0	1
Belgique	36	5	0	41
Bésil	7	1	0	8
Canada	45	18	0	63
Colombie	49	6	9	64
Congo RD	4	2	0	6
Croatie	3	0	0	3
Danemark	0	0	0	0
Écosse	1	1	0	2
Espagne	3	1	0	4
Équateur	4	1	0	5
États-Unis	27	3	1	31
France	81	28	0	109
F.-Réunion	4	0	0	4
Haiti	37	3	16	56
Inde	25	0	31	56
Indonésie	24	5	37	66
Islande	2	0	0	2
Irlande	5	1	0	6
Italie	120	10	12	142
Kénya	6	1	9	16
Madagascar	16	4	13	33
Malawi	30	5	0	35
Méxique	1	0	0	1
Mozambique	1	0	0	1
Nicaragua	3	0	0	3
Ouganda	3	0	0	3
Papouasie	5	1	0	6
Pays-Bas	61	16	0	77
Pérou	25	4	1	30
Philippines	11	0	9	20
Portugal	15	1	0	16
R.Dom.	1	0	0	1
Rome	7	1	0	8
Zambie	2	1	0	3
	<b>715</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>978</b>

<b>By "Entité de travail / Entity governing the work"</b>				
	<b>Priests</b>	<b>Brothers</b>	<b>Scholastics</b>	<b>Total</b>
Afrique	24	2	9	35
Allemagne	21	1	0	22
Argentine	4	1	0	5
Belgique	38	5	0	43
Bésil	7	1	0	8
Canada	43	17	0	60
Colombie	49	6	7	62
Congo RD	2	2	0	4
Espagne-Équateur	7	2	0	9
États-Unis	26	3	1	30
France	85	28	0	113
GB&I	25	6	0	31
Haiti	41	3	16	60
Inde	25	0	31	56
Indonésie	24	5	37	66
Italie	123	10	9	142
Madagascar	16	4	13	33
Malawi	18	3	0	21
Mozambique	1	0	0	1
Nicaragua	3	0	0	3
Papouasie	7	2	0	9
Pays-Bas	68	18	0	86
Pérou	25	4	3	32
Philippines	11	0	9	20
Portugal	15	1	3	19
M. Générale	7	1	0	8
	<b>715</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>978</b>