



# L'Écho Montfortain

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## A WORD FROM FATHER GENERAL

During the past several months I have been encouraged and challenged by the growing number of persons around the world who find a path to holiness and mission in the spirituality of St. Louis-Marie. In Nigeria –where there is no presence of the Montfortian congregations – thousands of people are following a systematic and prayerful preparation for the Consecration to Jesus Wisdom; it seems that some of the best seminarians and clergy in that country are those who have made the consecration. In Spain, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, the Philippines, Colombia, France, Belgium and Italy – as just a few examples – the Montfortian Family is reaching out to lay people, clergy and religious to share the treasure of our spiritual heritage. All this certainly invites us to pause and ask: *How does the spirit and life of Montfort truly touch me?*

The spiritual tradition of St. Louis-Marie ought to be the heart and soul that breathes life and love into all our ministry and mission. What we do incarnates what we believe and what we love; it incarnates who we are. I would like to share the example of two persons who witness to the impact of Montfort on their lives.

First, the Holy Father, John Paul II. August 19th, during his emotional visit to Poland, the Pope celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Shrine of Our Lady of Kalwaria. The aged, ailing, but immensely happy pontiff ended his words with a prayer which concluded: “Most Holy Mother, Our Lady of Calvary, obtain also for me strength in body and spirit, that I may carry out to the end the mission given me by the Risen Lord. To you I give back all the fruits of my life and my ministry; to you I entrust the future of the Church; to you I offer my nation; in you do I trust and once more to you I declare: *Totus Tuus, Maria! Totus Tuus.* Amen.”

The spirituality of St. Louis-Marie has moulded the Holy Father for 60 years. Even in his old age, we see the sense of total consecration, dedication to mission, confidence in the Love of God, all rooted in his relationship with Mary. Whether we are 20, 60 or 80 years of age, this witness of John Paul II gives us Montfortians much to think about and much to rejoice in.

A second witness to Montfort points to a more theological and pastoral perspective. Mgr. François Garnier, Archbishop of Cambrai and former bishop of Luçon in France, wrote me a letter encouraging everyone to continue to work for the cause of the doctorate of St. Louis-Marie. In just a few words Mgr. Garnier sketched a whole programme of

research and pastoral action as he said: “ We must continue to write on the present day impact of the message of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort.

From Mary to Christ, to bring balance to the Marian cult.

From Christ to the Trinity, to enter into the Mystery of God.

From the Trinity to Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to rediscover a sacramental life.

From Baptism to the service of the most poor, to show the truth of our conversion.”

I can only urge each of you, in your ministry and pastoral activities, in your parishes, shrines, academic centres, even in your retirement or sickbed : put flesh and blood, reflection and action onto this canvas of Montfort’s spirituality. Live it and make it alive for men and women of today.

*William Considine, smm  
Superior General*

## **OFFICIAL NEWS ITEMS**

### **FIRST PROFESSIONS**

In Litchfield, U.S.A., on 15 August 2002: Alain LEPAGE and Louis-Paul SAINT-LAURENT (of the Province of Canada) ; Jim Jude MCKENNA (of the Province of Gt. Britain and Ireland).

In Bandung, Indonesia, on 15 August 2002: Andreas SANTOSO, Yohanes Satrio Walfare NAHAS, Marselinus NGEBU, Adrianus JOGO, Christianus Viktor LADA, Rafael Servianus LEPEN, Yohanes ASMAN, Johanes Gregorius GUMA TUKAN, Yohanes Dominikus DEMU, Fransiskus Aloysius REKU RESI.

In Mbarara, Uganda, on 15 August 2002: Frédéric BOLUMBU WANGELA, Théophile MOLEPELIA NGINGOYELE (of the Democratic Republic of Congo).

### **PERPETUAL PROFESSION**

At Maria Bhavan, Bangalore, India, on 29 June 2002: Reny Joseph PUNNAPPANAL.

### **ORDINATION TO THE DEACONATE**

In Kannur, India, on 1 July 2002: Reny Joseph PUNNAPPANAL.

### **ORDINATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD**

In Bogotá, Colombia, on 29 June 2002: Benigno ZORRO CORREDOR.

In Blantyre, Malawi, on 29 June 2002: Oscar SAGWANTI.

In Kisangani, Congo, on 14 July 2002: Jean de Dieu EKANGA MBULA.

## EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL COUNCIL

From October 3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> all the provincials and superiors of general delegations, along with the general council and also the superior of Peru-Brazil, will gather in Bangalore, India for the Extraordinary General Council. This will be the first time in many years for the EGC to meet outside the General House, and it should provide the opportunity for many of the superiors to learn something first-hand about the SMM in India and Asia. Among the topics on the Agenda: the follow-up of the 1999 General Chapter, the *Ratio* or Montfortian Formation Plan, the Association Mary Queen of All Hearts, new initiatives in mission, the inter-relationship of aging and younger entities.

### MISSIONS : SHADOWS AND LIGHTS

The Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (CEP) invited all the missionary institutes to a meeting held at the Pontifical Urbanianum University in Rome from 27 to 31 May. The Montfort Missionaries were happy to take part in this gathering.

More than 200 institutes from every continent participated in this meeting. Its double aim was: to promote an exchange among the institutes that are actively working in the missions, and to offer the CEP useful indications for accomplishing its role.

During the meeting we examined and discussed the affirmation from the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: “The mission of Christ the Redeemer, confided to the Church, is still far from being fully realised.” Certain important principles concerning the mission, that here and there had fallen into doubt, were also reaffirmed: that mission is an essential part of the task confided by Christ to the Church; that the mission *to the nations (ad gentes)* and the commitment *to life (ad vitam)* continue to remain valid and urgent; that missionary concerns ought to become a constant topic in pastoral activity because the Church, by its very nature, is missionary.

The meeting began with an intervention by Cardinal Crecenzio Sepe, prefect of the CEP; a panoramic view followed of the missionary situation on the five continents. This was followed by work-groups: four on Africa, three on Asia, three on America and two on Oceania. Each group was asked to identify aspects of vitality and hope as well as problems and difficulties for the continent. The presentation of the synthesis in the general assembly was very enlightening.

At the end of the work on May 31st, the Pope received the participants at an audience. Reminding us of the close link between religious life and commitment for the missions, the Holy Father also urged us not to give in to fatigue, routine and a certain spiritual dryness, “finding in the intimate union with God the strength to overcome every obstacle... I would like to invite you to consecrate yourselves with an even greater determination to this goal, keeping alive within you the sentiments of Paul, who exclaimed: *Woe unto me, if I do not proclaim the Good News.*”

Without going into all the details, allow me to underline some desires that emerged during the meeting and which were presented to the CEP, as they had asked:

- A growth in inter-ecclesial dialogue, a better listening to lay people and their greater participation in the responsibilities of the Church by organising meetings among religious, laity and missionaries;
- A great commitment in the promotion of inculturation;
- A better attention to religious and lay women in diocesan organisations;

- A new definition of the concept of mission *to the nations* in the context of globalisation and the migration of peoples...

To conclude, here are some of the more specific propositions which were presented:

- Proceed to put in place an African Conference of Religious;
- Invest more forces on the Asian continent.

The meeting in Rome, the first of its kind, was judged very positively by the participants because of the occasion it provided for intense exchanges, and for analysis and suggestions. It powerfully confirmed – against all discouragement or apparent lessening of their importance – the missionary nature of the Church, the contemporary face of the mission *to the nations*, and the missionary vocation *to life*.

*Ivo Libralato, s.m.m.*

## THE MONTFORT MISSIONARIES IN INDONESIA

In a letter dated 5 July 1924 and addressed to the Provincial of the Dutch Montfort Missionaries by Father Stanislaus, the Provincial of the Capuchins, we find the first indications of a certain interest being shown by our Dutch confreres in a mission in the Dutch East Indies (as they were called in those days). Father Stanislaus asks if the Montfortian Province of Holland “would be willing to take on part of the mission of Dutch Borneo as an independent mission.”

The correspondence which followed shows that this offer made by the Capuchins was given consideration. A period of reflection lasting four years was asked for, and these years were used to gather information elsewhere, as is shown by a letter of 11 May 1929, in which we learn that the Jesuits had rejected a request by the Dutch Montfortians to begin a mission on the Island of Java. Then we find a letter from Father Drehmans, a Redemptorist, suggesting that they try their luck with Mgr. Verstraelen in the little Soenda Islands or with the Capuchins in Sumatra.

In March 1936, a letter from Father Anacletus, the then Provincial of the Dutch Capuchins, to Father J. Bemelmans in Oirschot, reminding the Montfort Missionaries of the 1924 exchange of letters, had more success since, a short time later, Mgr. van Valenberg, the Vicar Apostolic of Pontianak, proposed entrusting a part of West Borneo to the Montfortians.

Borneo was not the first choice of the Dutch Montfortians, as is evident from a letter of 1937 from Father M. Hupperts (written after Mgr. van Valenberg’s offer), addressed to the Divine Word Fathers of Ende (Flores), asking permission to come and work in the vicariate of Flores. This request was turned down by Mgr. Leven, S.V.D.

In 1938, Mgr. van Valenberg renewed his request for the Montfort Missionaries to take charge of Sintang. Finally, and after quite a lot of correspondence, there was a favourable response. With the approval of the General Council of the Company of Mary, the application to take over Sintang from the Capuchins was sent to the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome. Approval was given in the letter of 23 September 1938.

One month later (on 5 October 1938), Father Jan Linssen and Brother Bruno were given their obedience for Borneo and, on 16 November, Father H. L’Ortye, a teacher in Rotselaar (Belgium), was appointed superior of the Montfortian mission of Borneo with a view to its development and its dedication to the Immaculate Conception of Mary. On 16 March 1939, the three missionaries set out from Brussels in the direction of Marseille in France. The following

day, they embarked on the *Sibajak* bound for Singapore, where they stopped over to take passage aboard the *Khoen Hoa*, which brought them to Pontianak, the capital of west Borneo.

On 7 April 1939, our Montfort Missionaries were received with great joy in Pontianak. They stayed there for ten days, meeting with the Vicar General and visiting the various missions of the Capuchins. Then, on 17 April, they continued their voyage on the *West Borneo* to arrive four days later in Sintang, a small town which was to become the centre of the new mission.

After a week's rest, they left for Bika, the end-point of their journey. Bika was the first mission to be taken over from the Capuchins. Such was the enthusiasm of the Montfortians that after only two months they opened a second mission post. On 10 June 1939, Father Jan Linssen moved to Putussibau. About a year later (on 7 March 1940), he was reinforced with the arrival of Fathers Lambertus van Kessel and Jef Wintraecken. Thanks to this reinforcement, they were able to make so many more visits to the "campongs", and they toyed with the idea of taking over more posts from the Capuchins. But then the Second World War broke out, and in 1942 all the Fathers, Sisters and brothers were interned in Kuching in the neighbouring region of Sarawak. Fortunately they did not know that this internment, during which they had so much sickness, misery and hunger to endure, was to last three years.

The Montfortians were lucky! At the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, they were all able to return to their mission posts. All had survived their internment and now they were able to continue their work up the River Kapuas. They tell us that during the three years of their absence, some lay people had done great work in carrying on the task of the missionaries. They had regulated church matters such as marriages, etc.; and they had taken good care of and preserved the various liturgical objects: chalices, chasubles, as well as the baptismal registers. Certainly the war had been a setback for the work of the missionaries, but the fact that, immediately after the war, many new Montfort Missionaries came to West Borneo, banished any disappointment. Little by little, all the mission stations of the Capuchins were taken over and, in 1947, the entire responsibility for the diocese of Sintang was in the hands of the Montfort Missionaries. The Superior, Fr. L'Ortye, took up residence in Sintang.

The chronicles tell us just how difficult was the work in the hinterland of Borneo: "Fortunately our missionaries were not too demanding, for the equipment they had was rudimentary." There were shortages at every level: lack of transport, lack of money. They did not even possess a rowing-boat, let alone a motor-boat. They lived on what they received from the Dutch government (Indonesia being a colony of the Netherlands). Given the fact that the number of Montfort Missionaries was growing, and that they were convinced that the numbers of Fathers and Sisters would continue to increase, they drew up plans for expansion.

The missionary region of Sintang is three times the size of Belgium. Until then all the mission stations were in the region of the Kapuas river, although another area with more inhabitants (the region of Melawi) was wide open for a mission. An opportunity to begin there came about when two village leaders came to Sintang to invite the missionaries to come and work up the river Melawi. The oldest of the missionaries, Fr. Jan Linssen, was sent there and, at the end of 1947, he opened the mission station of Serawai. The chronicles tell us that that first year in Serawai was very hard for Jan. Serawai had been chosen because of its position. The inhabitants were mainly Moslems. Why was it such a difficult year? Because of malicious gossip and rumours, and because the house was under constant surveillance; in other words the idea was to chase the missionaries away. But the good Father Jan did not budge. Two years later the mission station of Nanga Pinoh was started, situated half way between Sintang and Serawai.

What is involved in opening a mission station? One of the missionaries is sent to a certain area as a “prospector” to study the possibility of establishing a presbytery there. First of all, with the help of the Catholics in that area, the missionary builds himself a simple cabin. Little by little, this cabin is extended to serve as a church and to provide lodging, office space and a workshop. If, after a certain amount of time, the choice of place seems to be good, a more permanent building is constructed there.

A decree of 11 March 1948 from *Propaganda Fide* declared that the district of Sintang, until then merely a department of the Apostolic Vicariate of Pontianak, was to become a Prefecture Apostolic with Fr. Lambertus van Kessel, S.M.M. as its first Prefect Apostolic. At that time the prefecture comprised 15 Montfort Missionaries, 3095 baptised Catholics, 17 schools and 1159 pupils.

In 1950, our first “daja” priest, Fr. Alois Ding, completed his novitiate in Holland and returned to his native country. Father Ding had been ordained a diocesan priest in 1945 in Flores. Having expressed a desire to become a Montfortian, he was sent to Holland where he made his first vows on 8 September 1949.

In 1949, the Dutch army withdrew from Indonesia and the country became independent. All the missionaries were then faced with a choice of becoming Indonesian citizens. This was the time of “Indonesianisation”. The government demanded that, within a certain period of time, all functions must be filled by Indonesian citizens. The reaction of the Montfortians was: “If that is what is necessary, then we will change our citizenship.” In December 1951, half of our missionaries took Indonesian citizenship; the others had to wait a bit longer.

On 23 April 1956, after so many years of hard work, the Montfortian mission of Sintang became a Vicariate Apostolic. The Vicariate comprised 7 mission stations and 23 Montfort Missionaries. Unfortunately, the following year, on 8 April 1957, Fr. Jan Cloots died in Putussibau.

In 1959, relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands began to deteriorate, and the borders were closed to missionaries coming from the Netherlands. In fact, since 1954 no Dutch missionary had entered the country except Fr. Hub Swerts, who had a Belgian passport. Since it was becoming more and more difficult to reinforce the Montfortian group with people coming from the Netherlands, in March 1959, the Dutch Province handed over the mission of Sintang to the American Province. This decision had been preceded by a visit from the Provincial of the United States, Fr. Setzer. In December 1960, the first two American Montfort Missionaries, Frs. Ted Murphy and John Breslin, arrived in the country. In the course of the following years, eight other Fathers and one Brother joined the group. In 1964, Fr. Eugene Lynch was appointed superior of the mission of Borneo. In 1966/67 he returned to the United States to become Provincial.

An Indonesian Hierarchy was erected on 3 January 1961, which meant that the Vicariate Apostolic of Sintang became a diocese like the other dioceses. Then, following an improvement in relations with Holland, new missionaries arrived from there on 15 February 1966: Brother Ad Sommers and Fathers Wim Johannesma, Joep van Lier and Piet Derckx.

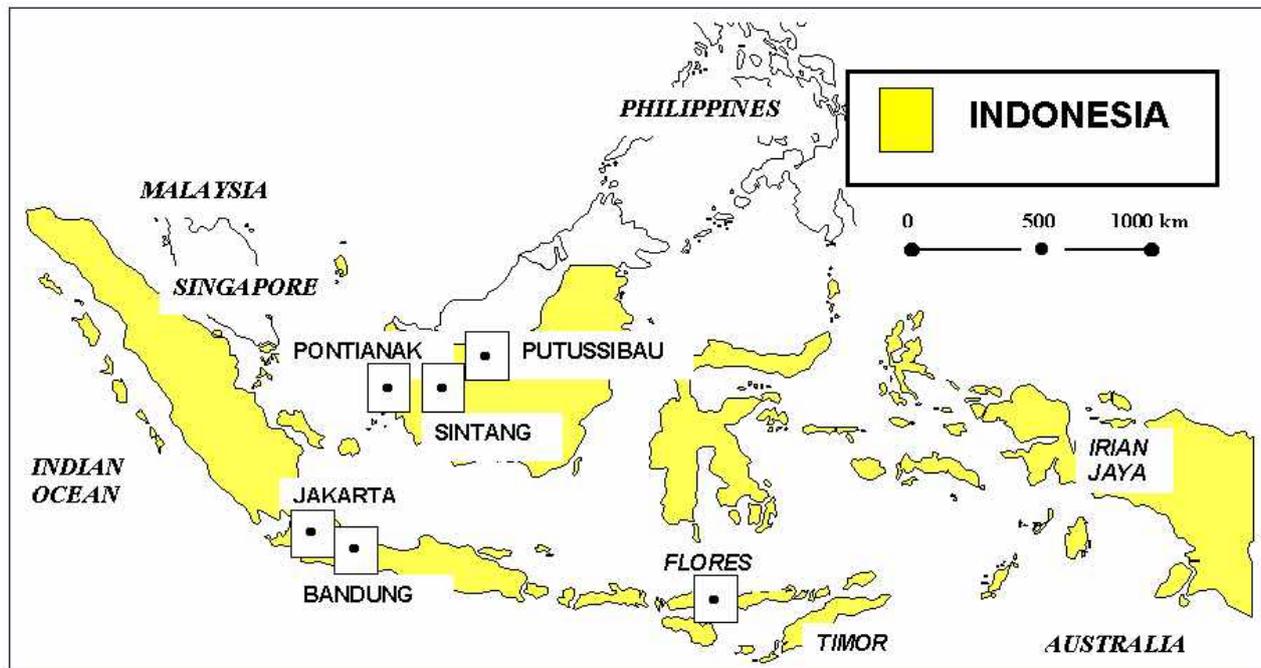
In 1967, Father Jos Hermans, the Provincial of Holland, was sent on visitation to Borneo by the General Council, with a view to planning for the future. The Americans said that they could no longer supply reinforcements. The United States Province had sent 7 Fathers and 1 Brother, but only 3 Fathers and 1 Brother remained. It was agreed with the United States Province that, for three years, America and Holland would share responsibility for the Montfortian mission in Borneo. Then in 1971, the mission returned to the care of the Dutch Province.

On 9 October 1973, Mgr. L. van Kessel, the Bishop of Sintang, retired and returned to Holland. Father Lam van de Boom became the apostolic administrator of the diocese until May 1977, when a diocesan priest, I. Doera, was appointed Bishop of Sintang. During the tenure of Fr. L. van de Boom, quite a few changes took place in the area managed and guided by the Montfort Missionaries. In particular in the area of economics and finance: a distinction was made between the diocese and the Company of Mary. Several other congregations began to work in the diocese of Sintang.

In 1968, two new young missionaries arrived: Jacq Maessen and Nico Schneiders. It was during the 1970s that the last Dutch Montfort Missionaries arrived in Indonesia: Fathers Henk Kalter and Wim Peeters. When in 1977-1978 the Indonesian government decreed that all functions must be filled by Indonesians, the problem of citizenship re-surfaced. The missionaries had to choose between taking Indonesian citizenship or returning to Holland. At that point those who were sick or aged returned to their native land, while the “young ones” opted for Indonesian citizenship. The government decree had the effect of reviving our desire to start a formation programme for those young men of the country who felt called to a Montfortian vocation.

When the first candidates presented themselves, Wim Peeters was appointed the first Novice Master on 26 November 1979 by Father M. Gendrot, the Superior General. Father Janus van der Vleuten was the first *socius*. This was the start of our Montfortian formation programme at Putussibau. Later, when the number of candidates grew, the postulancy and novitiate were moved first to Sintang, then to Bandung in 1985. In 1983, Mgr. Doera wanted to open a major seminary, for which he was still looking for a Rector: Fr. Piet Derckx was then chosen to take on this role. In June 1984, Piet left for Bandung to become the first Rector of the diocesan major seminary “Betang Batara”.

*(To be continued...)*



## OUR DEPARTED BRETHREN

### **Father Gerardus [Ger] CUPPEN (1929-2002)**

Died on 18 June 2002 in Valkenburg (Netherlands), aged 73, with 52 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1949, and was ordained priest on 20 March 1955. His first appointment was as a missionary in Mozambique; then, after completing studies in Missiology, he left for Malawi, where he was director of the Centre for Catechetical Training in Likulezi (Blantyre). In 1974 he returned to the Netherlands to work with “Missio” and to be a member of the Dutch National Missionary Council. In 1981, he was made a Councillor and Vicar Provincial. It was also at that time that he was appointed director of the Marian Apostolate at Berg en Dal. Since 1988, he worked in Broekhuizen, and was parish priest there until 2002, when bad health forced him to retire to Vroenhof. Ger’s whole missionary sense was characterised by an incessant search for the most contemporary models of missionary work, catechetical training and missionary vision. He was also committed to a spirituality of Divine Wisdom, proposed as a living reality by the Daughters of Wisdom, whom he accompanied on this way.

### **Father Gérard [Gir] BISSCHEROUX (1925-2002)**

Died on 10 July 2002 in Schimmert (Netherlands), aged 77, with 56 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1945, and was ordained priest on 4 March 1951. Ill health dogged his whole existence, but did not prevent him living a full life. He was first of all a missionary in the Congo, where he returned for a while after studying the Bantu languages in Gand. Then, after a few years of ministry in Belgium, he left for Malawi and the diocese of Chikwawa (1969-1973). Returning to the Netherlands he became involved in centres for African refugees and asylum-seekers in Schimmert and Heerlen. Through his support for these people in distress, he remained a passionate missionary to the end.

### **Father Cornelis van ECK (1919-2002)**

Died on 18 July 2002 in Montpellier (France), aged 83, with 60 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1941 and was ordained priest on 16 March 1947. After specialist studies in Dutch and the classical languages, he was a teacher at the Montfortian Minor Seminary in Schimmert. His students there appreciated, among other things, his enthusiasm for his subject and his skill as a pianist. When the Minor Seminary was closed, he went on to teach in, and direct, other teaching establishments, before being elected a General Assistant of the Congregation, a post he filled from 1981 to 1987. From 1988 onwards, he was chaplain to the Dominican Sisters of St-Martin de Trévières in the South of France. There he also devoted much time and energy to the study of Montfort and his spirituality, for which he had a great enthusiasm. His death was sudden: taken to hospital in Montpellier on 17 July, he died the following night. In accordance with his own wishes, he was buried in France, in the cemetery of the Dominicans of St-Martin de Trévières. He was one of the striking personalities of the Dutch Province. All those who crossed his path or worked with him remember his interest in the confreres, as well as in the Congregation and its heritage.

### **Father Antonius [Toon] BERNARD (1922-2002)**

Died on 19 July 2002 in Valkenburg (Netherlands), aged 80 with 57 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1944 and was ordained priest on 28 March 1950. From 1951 until 1992 he was a missionary in Borneo (Indonesia), where he travelled about with his box of medicines and his portable altar. He did everything he could to heal his people, and he said recently that his expertise in this field never interfered with his priesthood, which was truly for him the most important task. He would speak just as readily about a 10-day course given to baptised adults, as about the fact that he had assisted 150 women to give birth. Returning to the Netherlands,

he was chaplain to a retirement home and superior of the community in Oirschot, where he lived until 2001. At that point his failing health meant he had to join the community of aged and sick confreres in Valkenburg. He will be remembered especially for his missionary dedication. His life was characterised by his care for others, which might explain his reluctance to take care of himself during the last months of his life.

**Father Mathias RUYPERS (1918-2002)**

Died on 7 August 2002 in Sievernich (Germany), aged 83 with 62 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1939 and was ordained priest on 19 March 1945. Like many of the Dutch confreres, he spent a big part of his life in Malawi, where he exercised his ministry in various mission posts (1946-1967). Since then he had always worked in Germany. After a brief stay in Eckenhagen, he was appointed to Sievernich, where at first he was a curate, and later parish priest until 1984. He stayed on there afterwards. For everyone he was a brother who was full of life, spontaneous and warm.

**Father Johannes (Jean) ROUSSEAU (1919-2002)**

Died on 18 August 2002 in Maastricht (Netherlands), aged 82, with 58 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1943 and was ordained priest on 27 March 1949. After a pastoral year, he embarked for Malawi, where he worked from 1950 until 1972. He was in various places before founding the mission post of Lirangwe, where he remained from 1959 until 1972. Returning to the Netherlands, he was a parish priest in Maastricht, then chaplain to elderly people. He was a modest, affable and sociable man whose interior peace shone through.

**Father Michael ROONEY (1930-2002)**

Died on 2 September 2002 in Belfast (Northern Ireland), aged 72, with 52 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 8 September 1949 and was ordained priest on 1 January 1955. First of all he taught for 5 years at Montfort College, Romsey, before leaving for Malawi, where he spent the next 23 years (1961 to 1984). Returning to his province for health reasons, he nevertheless remained very active, in Monaghan, then in Belfast. He was noted always for an indefatigable desire to do the will of God, great confidence in Providence and a remarkable love for missionary life. On his return from the missions, he continued to support the people of Malawi and his missionary confreres. His whole life was characterised by a deep devotion to Our Blessed Lady and her Rosary.

**Father José ACOSTA RODRIGUEZ (1920-2002)**

Died on 9 September 2002 in Choachi (Colombia), aged 81 with 63 years of Religious Profession. He made his first vows on 6 February 1939 and was ordained priest on 2 July 1944. At first he was professor at the Minor Seminary at Choachi; he then worked for many years preaching parish missions, with great zeal and Montfortian spirit. From 1964 he dedicated his life to pastoral activity in the diocese of Villavicencio, where the needs were growing faster than the local clergy. He was thus parish priest or vicar in a large number of parishes. He accepted frequent transfers in a great spirit of faith. He was noted for his fidelity to his commitments and for minutely accomplishing his tasks. Of this simple, humble confrere, a man of few words, one could truly say “goodness makes little noise”. Everyone affectionately called him by the fitting diminutive: “Padre Josecito, Padre Chepito.” In these last years he suffered from Parkinson’s disease, which forced him to retire in Choachi.