

LETTER TO THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY

Dear Lay Mennaisians, Dear Brothers,

From 26 March to 24 April 2024, the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Instruction held its 28th General Chapter in Ariccia, not far from Rome, Italy, on the theme: "Servants of Hope". A total of 51 Brothers, including six young Brothers, took part in our entire Chapter Assembly. The six lay members of the International Commission of the Mennaisian Family were also with us for the first week. It was a magnificent experience of mutual listening, fraternity and a common search for God's will. We experienced at first hand the marvels that the Holy Spirit accomplishes when we are gathered in the name of the Lord around the Virgin Mary. Like the apostle John, we want to bear witness to what we have seen and heard, contemplated and experienced (1 Jn 1, 1).



First week: Opening of the Chapter and spiritual retreat

The General Chapter officially opened at 8.30 am on 26 March 2024 with a beautiful celebration of invocation to the Holy Spirit, accompanied by significant symbols for our Institute: the Word of God, the Rule of Life, the icon of the Virgin Mary, the 26 flags of the countries where the Institute is present, the new statuette of Jean-Marie de la Mennais... At the end of the morning, we welcomed Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for a time of exchange. He invited us to put Christ at the centre of our consecrated life. He then celebrated the Eucharist for us and shared our lunch. On the morning of 27 March, Brother Superior General, after a brief presentation of his report, proposed, using the method of conversation in the Spirit, a process of discernment of the Lord's calls for our Congregation and the best ways to respond to them. The afternoon of 27 March was devoted to the Institute's financial statements. Brother Claude Grégoire, Treasurer General, and Mr Yves Delarra, Director General of FIC-EXPERTISE, provided us with some relevant ideas for preparing for the future and putting the economy at the service of the charism. From 28 to 31 March, we lived through the Easter Triduum, sharing the Lord's Supper on Thursday evening, following him all day Friday on the road to Calvary, living in silence on Saturday as we awaited his resurrection, and finally allowing ourselves to be joined by the Risen Lord on our way to Emmaus on Easter Sunday.

Second week: Mennaisian Family and the Rule of Life

During the first two days, lay people and Brothers together sought to respond to the Lord's calls, following the example of the servants at the wedding in Cana, so that the good wine of the Gospel continues to be served to the children and young people of today, especially the poorest and most disadvantaged among them. We have also committed ourselves to passing on the Mennaisian charism, to promoting vocations of Brothers and Lay Mennaisian Associates as well as co-responsibility in the Mennaisian Family.





On Wednesday 3 April, we began updating our Rule of Life, a process that began at the beginning of 2020. As we had to obtain the approval of the Dicastery of Consecrated Life for points of general government, we decided to work on these chapters first. On Saturday afternoon, all the articles in question were voted on by a large majority, often unanimously. Pentecost in Jerusalem more than 2000 years ago, Pentecost at the beginning of April 2024 in Ariccia during our General Chapter!

Third week: a Rule of Life to be lived and for life

During the whole of the third week, we alternated between working in "tables" to seek consensus and a plenary assembly to vote on the various articles of the chapters that were already ready. The consensus method chosen for the work on the Rule of Life therefore worked well: some listening to others and all listening to the Spirit. There was no longer any need for plenary debates. The results of the votes bear this out.

"Drawing its inspiration from the Gospel and the intuition of the Founders, transmitted and enriched by the living tradition of the Congregation, the Rule of Life of the Institute is for each Brother a sure guide in the path he has chosen.

The evangelical project that it expresses ... becomes for the Brother his itinerary for seeking God and his particular way of following the obedient Christ: "Look upon the Rule as the expression of God's will, and its strict observance as the surest way to please him and to sanctify yourselves" (**Rule of Life 2024, Ch. 1, 12**).



Fourth week: Rule of Life, elections and Servants of Hope

On Wednesday 17 April, the 433rd vote marked the end of the approval process for our new Rule of Life. A feeling of joy and thanksgiving pervaded all the members of the Chapter. At the same time, we began our discernment for the election of the Brother Superior General, as well as the discernment based on the working document: "**Servants of Hope**", the fruit of contributions from all the communities of the Institute, inspired by the biblical icon of Cana: Jn 2, 1-12. On Thursday 18 April, at 17h00, the bells of the "*Casa Divin Maestro*" rang: the Institute has a "new" Superior General! The following day, we began the reflection process for the election of the Brothers Assistants, while continuing our discussions on various themes: initial formation, accompaniment of young Brothers, the *Ad Gentes* mission and the international Mennaisian community in Ploërmel. On Saturday 20 April, at around 18h00, the General Government was complete: three "new" Brother Assistants had just been elected. Happily, because we were almost at the end of our General Chapter: there were only three days left to work.



The consensus method continues to bear fruit. It has to be said that the Commission of Secretaries is doing an extraordinary job! The guidelines for discernment for the General Government and the document "**Servants of Hope**", which sets out the areas of activity for the next six years, were approved by a large majority.

Fifth week: Audience with the Pope, economy and charism, renewal of the Institute's Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and closure of the General Chapter

On Sunday 21 April, Sister Louise Touchette, Superior General of the Daughters of Providence of Saint-Brieuc, joined us. She would be sharing the last three days of our Chapter with us.



On Monday 22 April, we get up and have breakfast at dawn, and pray on the bus: Pope Francis receives us in private audience at 8h30. You have to be there 30 minutes before the appointment time. In his warm message, the Holy Father invites us to *"be fathers to those to whom we are sent, fathers who reflect the loving and compassionate face of God, and to cultivate a passion for service, humility, trust in God and the joy of being servants of his tenderness and mercy"*.

On 22 April at 3pm, we begin work on the latest *Instrumentum Laboris*: **"Economy and Charism"**. This document submits to the discernment of the Capitulants a certain number of important decisions concerning the Generalate, the General Administration, the Archives, the stable patrimony of the Institute... At 17h00, Sister Louise Touchette presented to us the current reality of the Daughters of Providence of Saint-Brieuc and that of the Sisters of Nebbi in Uganda. Wherever they are present, and despite their respective weaknesses, our Mennaisian sisters strive to remain servants of hope. The Postulator then gave us an update on the cause for the beatification of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. He invited us to intensify our prayer for the sick through the intercession of our Founder. Finally, the young Brothers present throughout the Chapter spoke to us of their experience, and urged us to be pilgrims of hope by lending each other mutual support in going to God and by pooling our resources to take care of the fraternity, to manage our patrimony well, and to form and accompany each Brother, especially the younger ones.



On 24 April, following in the footsteps of Brothers Étienne Barbier, Bernard Gaudeul and Yannick Houssay, former Superiors General, we renewed the consecration of our Institute and the Mennaisian Family to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. It is a sign that we want to follow Christ in the company of Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord.

At 16h00 on the same day, Brother Superior General addressed

the Capitulants before the closing vote of our 28th General Chapter. He reminded us that at Cana, Mary and Jesus lent each other mutual support so that the miracle would be possible. This is the path that the Brothers and Lay people of the Mennaisian Family are invited to follow so that the good wine can continue to bring joy to the children and young people of our educational centres. Without the laity or without the Brothers, our jars will not be filled to the brim. Together we are called to serve the new wine of the Gospel. This is what co-responsibility is all about: living more and more *"in Mennaisian Family mode"*. The miracle of fruitfulness is always possible. But on one condition: that we return to the Source to recover the original freshness of the new wine of the Gospel (EG no. 11).

Finally, at 17h30, the 457th vote officially brought our 28th General Chapter Assembly to a close. But, to tell the truth, it really begins now: it becomes a Chapter to be lived every day.

God alone in time! God alone in eternity!

Brother Hervé Zamor, S.G