

# NEWSLETTER GENERAL EXECUTIVE

CONGREGATION OF THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

Number 56, June 2018

## BRAZIL

*The entire General Executive was in Brazil from April 8 until April 23. The following is an extensive report on that visit to the brothers and about the work they are doing in Brazil.*

In Sabará – suburb of Belo Horizonte, with about 140.000 inhabitants – we visited the brothers and the parish priest who live in a district at the periphery of the city. Such a district is usually relatively poor and lacking much infrastructure. This particular district has, besides well-built houses, also many home-like structures put up on steep and dangerous slopes, that are difficult to approach when it is raining. There are still many unpaved streets and paths. This district also “enjoys” the unpleasant odors of the garbage dump, and the dust of a gravel operation.

The community of brothers counts four persons: two professed brothers and two novices. The formation and training of the novices is an important task of the community, and in addition, the brothers serve as jacks-of-all trades within the parish. Among others, they are involved in the preparation for the sacrament of confirmation, in working with youth, and in preparing those lay-persons who help with pastoral

activities such as the Vincentian organization and the pastoral care in the Sabará jail.

Br. Herbert lives in Rosal, a small town in the State of Rio de Janeiro. He works as a chaplain in the large parish of Bom Jesus do Itabapoana. Rosal is situated in the mountains, at a distance of about 30 km from Bom Jesus. Because of the elevation, Rosal is somewhat cooler, which is very much appreciated by br. Herbert. He serves in Rosal and two other places. In addition, he may be asked to help out in Bom Jesus.

This year, br. Herbert has lived in Brazil for 50 years. He has lived through the difficult times of the beginning, was

involved in education, studied theology and was ordained a priest. He was a parish priest, but now serves as a chaplain, with which he hopes to continue for many more years. He is happy in Rosal. Br. Herbert has initiated a pastoral program for vocations for our congregation. He is also a faithful translator of congregational texts for the Brazilian brothers.

The brothers lived and worked in Joaima, Almenara and Jordânia, cities in the valley of the Jequitinhonha River, a poor and arid area. Three brothers are still present in Jordânia. The brothers chose this area because of its poverty. They assisted in establishing the new diocese of Almenara, worked with Caritas, served as parish priest, did administrative work, were involved with choirs, and assisted catechists for the diocese, and so on.



In Jordânia, the brothers are involved in Lar Glorieux, a home for the elderly needing care, and also for some young persons needing permanent attention. Furthermore, the brothers are involved in caring for the poor, in helping those addicted to drugs, and in caring for our own elderly brothers. The brothers work well together with the parish priest who always can count on their help.

In Almenara, br. Pedro supports the ladies of *The Eighth of March Group*, also known as *The Maria's of Lourdes*. This group shares the charism of Glorieux and of the brothers of Our Lady of Lourdes, and help individual members in their own life-situation, for example with assisting women in need. Sometimes, the group as a whole, or individual members, are involved in some project. One project that impressed me very much is that of dealing with women in prison.

The Betim house of the brothers has a lot on its plate. It is the central house for the Brazilian brothers where chapters and other meetings are held. It also is the house of formation for aspirants and postulants, for the welcoming of guests, and it also houses a community center. The housing for the brothers and the candidates has been improved in 2016, and is now excellent.

The community center offers an outstanding infrastructure for activities in three districts. These three districts are all located at the periphery of the city, and are disadvantaged urban areas with few facilities and many problems. Problems like drug-addiction, domestic violence and violence in the neighborhood, people with little education, unemployment, the Brazilian financial crisis, and a serious political crisis resulting in an uncertain future.

Four elementary schools make use of the center for sports, games and extra lessons. The children have their school lessons in the morning, and spend the afternoon at the center (or the other way around). The Betim municipality pays for the activities at the center, and for the personnel that is needed. A meal is included.

In addition, courses are offered (sewing, using a computer, painting). There is also psychological support for the young and the elderly, support in preparing for the future. There are sports and there is room for dancing, for organizing outings, and for the celebration of special days (like the Our Lady of Lourdes celebration, and the day to celebrate Glorieux (after whom the center, Obra Social Glorieux is named). There are activities for all ages. In addition to professional helpers, there are many volunteers who also help with the activities.



Brother Herman Yosef Gultom attending a sewing session.

During a meeting with the executive of the Brazilian pro-province, the present state of affairs of the pro-province was considered. The formation of candidates counts as a serious task for the pro-province. Right now, there is one candidate, three postulants, and two novices. There are also contacts with possible new candidates.

We enjoyed beautiful events in Betim, such as a day of reflection which included original prayer services; a festive eucharistic celebration followed by a sociable get-together and a special churrascinho (a kind of BBQ), and there were occasions when attempts were made to speak English with the candidates, the Brazilian brothers and the visitors.

This was a meaningful visit for the visitors, because seeing something with one's own eyes and experiencing something for yourself, is different from just verbal accounts. That also was true for the



candidates and the brothers. That the congregation is more than just Brazil, and that we belong together, became tangible right away.

*br. Ton Houdé*

## A JOINT EXCURSION FOR THE SISTERS AND BROTHERS

Tuesday, May 22, 2018: the sisters from Ronse and the brothers from Oostakker enjoyed a joint half-day excursion to the water production facility of Evergem-Kluizen (Belgium).



*With thanks to br. Paul Daemen*

## MEETING IN ROME

### ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION OF GENERAL SUPERIORS

This assembly takes place twice a year, and involves the General Superiors of male religious with papal rights (USG). This Union counts 212 member congregations or orders. There is also a similar kind of Union for women (UISG). Large orders and congregations, but also small ones such as ours, are part of this Union.

It is important for our congregation to stay in touch with religious life globally, and this get-together makes it possible. If possible, the prefect and/or the secretary of the congregation for religious life would attend for some time, also making it clear what the current issues are for this congregation. The current Pope has met with the assembly twice, and he has very candidly and comprehensively dealt with the questions asked.

This time, the Assembly met from May 23 to May 25 in Casa del Divin Maestro, close to Castel Gandolfo (Italy). This is a house for retreats, and belongs to the Fathers Paulinos.

The topic for this meeting was *listening to youth*, in connection with the coming synod of bishops about youth. Two secretaries of this synod talked extensively about the preparations for this synod and about the work-document that is being prepared and that is expected to be released in the month of June.

Important issues in that document are the responses to the survey among the youth of all dioceses, and the outcome of the pre-synod held in Rome by representatives of youth. Present were representatives of catholic youth, but also those of other religions and of no religion at all. The Pope urges to involve all young people in dialogue.

There will also be talk about vocations, but not just about vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but also about vocations to the married state, to the lay state, and to roles within society.

During this assembly, there were testimonies from young religious and lay-persons who spoke about their experiences in Aleppo, Brazil, Colombia, Croatia, The Philippines, and Portugal. Among them was a young woman who works together with the Franciscans in San Paulo, and a lay-worker of the brothers of John de Deo, who talked about how he and his wife are working in different ways and for several years as missionaries.

In addition to these inspiring testimonies, there was a very interesting talk, entitled *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment*. The speaker was father Eunan McDonell, an Irish Salesian. He dealt especially with the difficult process of guidance and discernment in vocations to religious life and living the life of a priest in the church. One of his recommendations was that vocational pastoral activity must respect young people, and must help them to discover their true vocation, also pointing him/her to where he/she could realize his/her vocation. He emphasized that vocational pastoral activity should not only have one's own congregation in mind.

The assembly elected from among its members ten representatives who will take part in the synod of the bishops about youth that will take place in Rome in October of this year.

*br. Ton Houdé*

## ETHIOPIA



Care and immediate help for the homeless was one of the first projects of the brothers when they started working in Addis Abeba. A meal, the opportunity for relaxation and doing the laundry, medical attention if asked for, these were some of the services offered. In dialogue with local authorities, there is an annual occasion for spoiling these people with something special. This year, it was the handing out of blankets. No redundant luxury for someone who has no roof over her/his head. The photo shows brother Hugo Verhulst handing out a blanket to one of the regular customers.

## A FINAL WORD

*The Indonesian brothers Herculan Harjono and Matheus Amuna will make their first vows in the novitiate of Lawang on July 2. In name of everybody: Congratulations!*

***We wish you a good summertime and a relaxing holiday!***

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