

NEWSLETTER GENERAL EXECUTIVE

CONGREGATION OF THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

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BRAZIL: A YOUNG TREE PRODUCING GOOD FRUIT

Brothers Theo van den Boer and Ton Houdé traveled together to Brasil. They visited the projects of the brothers, and were present when the brothers Edenilson Goncalves Coelho and Renan Sebastião Nunes made their first vows.



Brother Renan, accompanied by his parents.

shifting soil, collapsed houses, fatalities, wounded people, and severe damage. Minas Gerais, where most of the brothers are residing, was heaviest hit. In the two cities, Betim and Sabará, the brothers have formed two communities. Regularly, new and heavy downpours were to be expected, so that travel became a problem. Luckily, things went okay for the visitors, but that cannot be said about the residents of Minas Gerais: they suffered 44 fatalities.

Upon their return to Europe, the storm Ciara had arrived there as well, interfering with air traffic. Luckily, the two travelers arrived in Zaventem, Brussels, just in time and without problems.

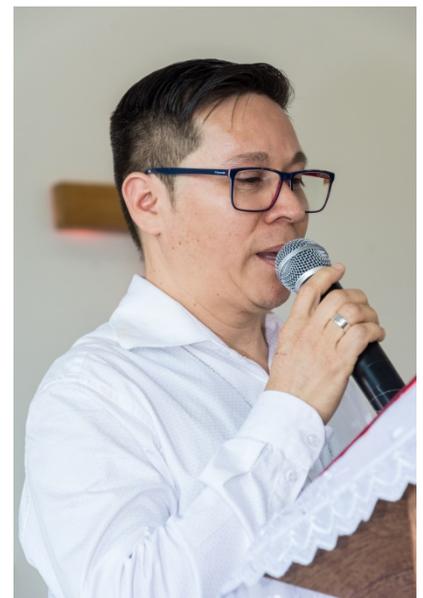
The highlight of the visit was the Profession on Sunday, February 2nd, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. It was also a day for the church community to highlight religious vocations. This Profession took place in one of the churches of the Divino Pai Eterno parish in Betim, home of the community of the brothers. There was a great deal of interest shown by family, friends and acquaintances of the brothers, the parishes where the brothers serve, and several other religious, such as the Fraters of Tilburg.

Br. Renan was accompanied by his parents upon entering the church, and br. Edenilson by his brother Edivaldo. After the Homily, the actual ceremony of the profession of vows took place,

The brothers Edenilson Goncalves Coelho and Renan Sebastião Nunes made their first vows in Betim on February 2. The last time that this happened was 11 years ago!

Br. Ton Houdé was there to perform the official duties at the ceremony, and br. Theo van den Boer had been invited by the Brazilian brothers to accompany br. Ton. Br. Theo, as the former general superior, visited Brasil many times. This time, he was able to see the changes that had taken place during the past 5 years.

The weather played an important role once again during this visit. Just prior to the arrival of the two brothers, part of Brasil had been hit by bad weather and lots of rain, resulting in flooding,



Br. Edenilson saying a word of thanks in name of both brothers.

involving a dialogue between the general superior and the two brothers. This dialogue had to do with questions about what the brothers are intending, about making the vows and the signing of the formal papers, the presentation of the crucifix and the ring with the insignia of the congregation. All religious present came forward and lined up around the altar to sing together the congregational song. The Eucharistic celebration was as usual, and at the end, br. Ton addressed the people present, while br. Edenilson, also in name of br. Renan, thanked everyone. The people were given the opportunity to congratulate the two brothers, followed by a warm meal in the Social Center Glorieux. It was a nice day, but also a day that had required a lot of efforts to prepare by brothers and volunteers. Everything went well. The church and the Social Center Glorieux were quickly returned to their normal state.

In Betim, one met some new candidates interested in the life of a brother. Within the next few months, it will be clear who will actually enter the process of formation.



Br. Herbert and his housemates.

In Rosal, in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brother Herbert de Gier was visited. This city had also suffered from the heavy rain. The people were still busy cleaning up the mess, mostly mud. Items that couldn't be used anymore, were put outside on the street. Crews from the municipality tried to clean the streets and remove the trash. One of the bridges in Rosal had been damaged, but had now been repaired and could be used again.

Br. Herbert is an ordained priest, serving three villages in the mountains. In addition, he sometimes assists in the main parish church of Bom Jesus do Itabapoana. The three churches in the mountains belong to that parish. He is doing okay, but his health could be better. That is why the doctor advised against traveling to Betim, not a simple distance away: 11 or 12 hours to and 11 or 12 hours from.

Jordânia was also part of the itinerary. Also not a simple trip: 14 hours to and 16 hours from. Nobody had been able to come to Betim: br. Cornelio who, because of his age, doesn't go outside anymore, br. Pedro, who was recuperating from an illness, and br. Antonio de Amorim, who is looking after the two brothers. The house of the brothers is next to the care home Lar Glorieux, a home particularly for

elderly men and women who need help. These are people of minimal income, and who cannot be taken care of by family. Visitors and authorities are impressed by the level of care and service, but in general they don't do much in support of the Center.

The municipality of Jordânia does try to help, but, since a few years, it isn't able to obtain sufficient financial means from the federal government. In general, the care of the elderly is not a priority in Brasil, but the elderly do enjoy the free use of public transport in the city.

We also notice that the federal government is postponing all support for social services, making it more difficult to keep those social services alive. Our Social Center in Betim is also experiencing the effect of what is happening.



Group photo: the newly professed brothers, br. Theo van den Boer (5th from l to r), br. Ton Houdé (3rd from r to l), and some Brazilian brothers and candidates.

Vocations for our congregation in Brasil are receiving much attention, and is producing results. But one shouldn't think in terms of big numbers. The road from candidacy to profession, to vows for life, is a very long one, and not easily traveled. But let's be happy with the growing interest in our charism. In the month of March, a few new candidates will start their the process of formation. Let's be thankful for this new life.

Br. Ton Houdé

A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ...

For one of our brothers, namely Br. Hugo Verhulst, it was a special Christmas. In the following abbreviated story, it will be explained why!

A few days prior to Christmas, there was a telephone call from Abba Petros. He asked me if I was interested in accompanying him to the Simien Mountains to organize a Eucharistic celebration for the Belgian royal family. However, those mountains are not next door, about 750 km north of Addis, which means travel by car and plane. We traveled by plane to Gondar. After a flight of one hour and a half, we arrived at the beautiful city in the mountains, and spent the night in a hotel near the airport.

It was Christmas eve. After a good sleep and a hearty breakfast, we went to Debark where we would spend the night.

Meanwhile, I had a very long talk with the king about our projects in Addis Ababa. Especially the stories about the building/renovations of the little houses and the toilets in the slums of Addis got his special attention.

At the start of the Eucharistic celebration, booklets were handed out. I had taken my guitar with me, and in the bitter cold of an elevation of almost 4000 meters, one heard hymns like "Nu syt wellecome", and also "Il est né"

The second part of this short report has to do with the slums a few days later, close to our project for the elderly, where some 90 elderly are able to get a warm meal. On January 2nd, 2020, the king would try to be with us around 5:00 p.m. to visit the project for the elderly, the little houses and the toilets. In the meantime, the elderly, br. Isayas and I waited patiently until 6 p.m., but in the end, br. Isayas decided to let the elderly have their evening meal, because several of them had to walk quite a distance to get home before dark. The royal family arrived after 6 pm, and understood that br. Isayas did what he had to do.

Then, the King took me aside and told me that he had talked with the president about our projects, and that a message would be sent in a couple of days – via the embassy – to meet with her. The purpose of the

visit was to discuss with her the problems with the toilets in Addis. She also wanted to help and to see if there was a chance of the different NGO's working together more.

A poor road took us to the slums. One could see the emotions on the face of the queen and her children when they saw everything. The queen even wanted to see an old toilet, so that she would get a good idea of the change this project would mean for the people. The king reacted surprised when he heard that such a toilet facility with four doors would now cost more than 3000 euro, while 5 years ago, it would have cost 2000 euro. Meanwhile, it was later than 7 p.m. and we said good-bye. The queen gave me a big pack with new shoes and other useful items.



I then hurried to have dinner with, among others, the Belgian ambassador. In his speech, the ambassador mentioned our congregation more than once and was very grateful for what the congregation was doing.

For me personally, this was the first time that I was directly in touch with the royal family, certainly in this way. Therefore, I am very grateful to Abba Petros for the opportunity to get to know them. One of these days, I will probably be invited for a talk with the president of Ethiopia. I hope that this will open up more roads towards doing more for the people.

“GOOD WORKS” ARE FRONTPAGE NEWS ...



... as you can see in the publication of “Katholiek Nieuwsblad” (KN, catholic newspaper) of February 7. KN is paying a lot of attention to the work the congregation is doing in Addis Ababa. We should be proud of this. The entire front page, complete with photos, is paying attention to the activities of the congregation, the brothers, the many volunteers, and the “Foundation Good Works Glorieux” and its sponsors in the Ethiopian capital. It's a nice recognition of the work of the congregation for people in need.

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