

AA News of the Assumption



**THE 34TH GENERAL CHAPTER
AS THEY EXPERIENCED IT**

**ORIENTATIONS
OF THE PROVINCIAL CHAPTERS**

**THE OBLATES AND ORANTES
OF THE ASSUMPTION
HAVE
NEW SUPERIORS GENERAL**



Agenda

Plenary General Council

- n° 1 : November 30 to December 9, 2023.

Ordinary General Council

- n° 4 : October 30-November 3, 2023.
- n° 5 : December 12-13, 2023.
- n° 6 : February 26-March 1, 2024.

Fr. Ngoa

- **October 17-28** : Florence.
- **November 21-24**: Union of General Superiors
- **Throughout December**: Belgium and the Netherlands.
- **January 3-11**: France.

Fr. Benoît

- **December 27-January 11**: France.

Fr. João

- **November 13-15**: Brazil (Provincial Chapter).

Fr. Thierry

- **November 6-10** : Instruction on the protection of minors.

Fr. Étienne

- **Throughout October and November**: courses in Italian

Fr. Alex

- **October 4-15**: Madagascar.
- **October 15-29**: East Africa.
- **November 4-15**: Africa.
- **November 22-December 1**: CEC (Rome).
- **December 16-19**: Paris.
- **December 26-January 1**: Boston.

On the cover

The 2nd session of the European Provincial Chapter, held from August 18 to 26 at Valpré (see pages 10-11), used the «théâtre de verdure» recently created in the large park of our guest house in Écully (France) for its prayer times.

Journal of “Due Pini”



The year of a General Chapter leads to many changes that affect the General House! 2023 does not deter from that rule, at least on two levels.

The first is the arrival of a new General Curia, that numbers seven members (there were six in the previous curia): the Superior General, four General Assistants and two General Officers (the Treasurer and the Secretary-Procurer). We should mention that of these seven, five are new, bringing bright new faces to Due Pini! As you can see from the agenda here-in, this whole new group is ready to make its mark, with its travel as they begin to visit the Provinces... not to mention their study of Italian for most of this new group!

The other aspect of change concerns the members of the community in Rome who are not part of the General Curia. Many among them left the house last summer or are preparing to leave, such as Frs. Dalmon (who went to Madagascar with a diploma in spirituality), Emmanuel (having left to study in Lyon), Gervais (who returned to Florence), Alexis (planning to go to Nairobi once his doctorate is completed)... A new brother, Br. Lâm, has come from Vietnam to provide service to the General House. Finally, our numbers for this year should include 13 religious residents at Due Pini, where they will be happy to welcome brothers who are traveling, particularly those who come to participate in reunions of the congregation— most likely to be scheduled soon!

The picture shows all 13 religious who will be at Due Pini for this year. From left to right : (1st row) Fr. Alex Castro (Treasurer both general and local, Philippines—USA), Fr. Etienne Ratalata Rafanambinantsoa (Assistant General, Madagascar), Fr. Thierry Kambale Kahongya (Assistant General, DR-Congo), Very Rev. Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba (Superior General, DR-Congo), Fr. Ignace Akoule Aïssah (Islamology, Togo).

(2nd row) Fr. Vincent Leclercq (Secretary General for Formation, France), Fr. Michel Kubler (Secretary and Procurer General, France), Fr. Fabrice-Marie Adzakli (clinical psychology, Togo), Fr. Benoît Bigard (Vicar General, France), Br. Gilles Allard (service to the General House, Canada), Fr. João Gomes da Silva (Assistant General and local superior, Brazil), Br. Paul Trinh Ngoc Lâm (service to the General House, Vietnam), and Fr. Dominique Nguyen Van Tho (service to the General House, Vietnam).

“But at your word I will cast the nets” (Lk 5:5)



Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba
Superior General of
the Augustinians of the
Assumption

According to the Gospel of Saint Luke (5, 1-11), Simon Peter and his companions had gone to their usual fishing, casting their nets here and there. However, they had spent the whole night without taking anything. But we see how Jesus enters the scene. He wants to preach first, and he needs a boat to be in a place where he can be clearly heard. And at the end of the preaching comes the order to Simon Peter: “Go out to sea, and cast your nets for fishing.” Simon Peter, with his expertise, wants to show Jesus that at that time, it is impossible, the best time for fishing having passed. Then he submits to the master’s order by pronouncing these words which restore life: “But, on your word, I will throw the nets.” » We know the rest of this story.

I know that in most of the (Vice-)Provinces of the congregation, you have still, after the second part of the provincial chapters, cast your nets. You have thrown them into the education and formation sectors, into the digital continent, into parishes, etc. And of course, you often do this in “Alliance” with our lay brothers and sisters.

In some cases, you will make risky choices: unpopular choices, not-so-profitable choices, really new choices. So be the lucid pioneers of new choices for true joys, true Life, therefore choices according to the Gospel. Pope Francis, during his recent trip to Mongolia, spoke of “spending one’s life for the Gospel.” He called those around him - bishops, priests, consecrated persons and others - to return to the Lord from whom everything started. Otherwise, he says, “pastoral commitment risks becoming a provision of sterile services”. It is on the words of the Lord that we cast our nets.

Our Founder, Father Emmanuel d’Alzon, liked to use the words “goal” and “spirit”. He spoke very often, on the one hand, about our goal (the goal of the Assumption) and, on the other hand, about the spirit (the spirit of the Assumption). We therefore see that,

in all cases, an Assumptionist should be driven by something. These are, moreover, the fundamental principles of spirituality that Father d’Alzon bequeathed to his religious family: “Two major principles emerge in the spiritual thought of Father d’Alzon and determine its general configuration. On the one hand, the goal to be pursued, which is expressed in the imperatives of the Kingdom. On the other hand, the spirit which must animate the workers of the Kingdom, namely the influence of the triple love over an entire life.” (Principes de Spiritualité assumptionniste, Editions du Centre d’Alzon, 1959, p. 2).

When Simon Peter agreed to cast the nets, it was not based on his expertise or his human calculations, but by obeying an “order” of another kind, therefore motivated by something, a word. Obedience had produced abundant fishing. “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” (Ps 34:9) The Pope, in the message cited above, invites us to have this experience of tasting and seeing the Lord, for example in adoration, because this becomes the condition for spending one’s life for the Gospel.

It is difficult to spend your life for the Gospel without being motivated to do so by Someone. We, Assumptionists, have a goal that we pursue and a spirit that inhabits us. We therefore agreed to spend our lives for the Gospel, driven by this spirit. “To spend life for the Gospel because we have tasted (cf. Ps 34) this God who has made himself visible, tangible, accessible in Jesus. Yes, He is the good news intended for all peoples, the announcement that the Church cannot stop bringing, incarnating it in life and ‘whispering it’ to the hearts of individuals and cultures.”, says Pope Francis.

Have you tasted the Lord? His mercy, his love, his justice, his goodness? So, move out to sea, and “cast your nets for fishing.” Yes, it is in the name of the Lord that we do it. Courage ! ■

Calls, nominations, agreements...

Fr. Ngoa Ya Shihemba, Superior General, with the approval of his Council, has called:

■ TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

1) Yan PIRES DA SILVA

(Brazil) (09/27/2023)

■ TO DEACONATE ORDINATION

2) Simon Jean Richard

RAFANOMEZANTSOA

(Madagascar) (09/27/2023)

■ TO PRIESTLY ORDINATION

3) KAMBALE KASAMBYA Moïse

(Africa) (09/26/2023)

4) KAMBALE YALAMIZE MUSAVE

Éric

(Africa) (09/26/2023)

5) MATONDO LUBIKAMO Juvens

(Africa) (09/26/2023)

6) MUZUDI KINDALA Dieu-Merci

(Africa) (09/28/2023)

7) Jefferson DE OLIVEIRA MARQUES

(Brazil) (09/28/2023)

8) Marie Joseph

RAFANOMEZANTSOA

(Madagascar) (09/28/2023)

9) Julien RAZANAJATOVO

(Madagascar) (09/29/2023)

10) Sambevoatse Jean Félix

TONGASOA

(Madagascar) (09/29/2023)

11) Justin RAKOTONIAINA

(Madagascar) (09/29/2023)

12) Richard

ANDRIAMAHENINARIVO

(Madagascar) (10/04/2023)

13) Mahonjo Laurent

SOANANAMBINA

(Madagascar) (10/04/2023)

14) David BINIDI

(Europe) (10/04/2023)

15) Jean-Valère KOUWAMA

(Europe) (10/04/2023)

NEW PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Ordinary General Council, has named:



Fr. NGUYEN Chi Ai, Provincial Superior of North America, for a 1st triennium, beginning of July 15, 2023.



Fr. Fabien LEJEUSNE, Provincial Superior of Europe, for a 1st triennium, beginning on July 15, 2023.

■ FIRST APOSTOLIC NOMINATION

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the approval of his Plenary General Council, has confirmed the first Apostolic nomination of **Fr. MASUMBUKO KOMBI Jérôme**, of the Province of Africa, "to the International Community of Assumptionist Formation of Kinshasa, as a member of the team of formators." He is also "to be made available to the ecclesiastical institutions of Kinshasa as an instructor of liturgy, and to the commission of the Episcopal Conference of the Congo that engages in the updates for the Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire."

■ OPENING OF A HOUSE

Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council, has given his approval for the opening of **an apostolic community at Long An** (Vietnam, Province of Europe).

■ EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY VOWS

Fr. Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, Superior General, with the consent of his Ordinary General Council, has agreed to an extension of temporary vows to **Br. Jean Emilien RANDRIANANTENAINA**, of the Province of Madagascar, for one year.

The 34th General Chapter as they experienced it...

Whatever your place, a Chapter is always a memorable experience! A few months later, we asked his Promoter, his “facilitator” as well as a guest layperson to testify about it.

Fr. Jean-Paul Sagadou (Europe), Promoter of the 34th General Chapter:

“See wide, far, deep! »



What particularly struck you in this Chapter?

For me it was like a space of African palaver, where fraternity was built in the service of the advent of the Kingdom of God. My role as Promoter, with the support of the Moderators, put me at the heart of the Chapter and I have grown in the passion I have for my religious family.

The goodwill of the capitulants towards me allowed me to provide this service without too much frustration. Obviously, fatigue was there. That said, we had a “good” chapter. Relying on the past, animated by the spirit of Father d’Alzon and aware of the reality of the present, we worked to invent a future for our religious family. The Jesuit Philippe Laurent said: *“The inventors of the future are not those who repeat. They are those who plan, who see far.”* That’s what we tried to do: see wide, see far, see deep!

A good surprise? a disappointment or frustration?

It is possible that some capitulants, and more generally religious people, do not yet understand that a Chapter is not a place of intrigues, calculations and strategies, but, fundamentally, a space of trust in the Holy Spirit, who *“renews the face of the earth”* (Ps 103). Its main task, beyond the election of the new government team, was to decipher the calls of the world and respond to them on the basis of the charisma of our Congregation.

Have we really dared to find new answers to the questions that arise before us? Have we had a real understanding of the situations in our world? It would be very pretentious to answer “yes”, and not very fair to say “no”! In fact, we became aware that God is there, among us, but also that he is coming. Therefore this obliges

us to work, in a spirit of solidarity and interdependence, for the advent of the Kingdom of God.

What reception did you perceive around you?

It is too early to measure it. That said, certain Provinces have already appropriated texts from the General Chapter during the 2nd sessions of the Provincial Chapters; it seems that the capitulants found them inspiring for the life of their Province. Let’s wait and see what the communities will do with it.

The General Chapter is an event that has been prepared for a long time and intensely experienced. There is only one thing left: to live it deeply, concretely, by embodying the directions that have been taken in the different aspects of our Assumptionist, secular and religious lives, every day, wherever we are. ■



Fr. Nicolas Potteau (Europe) :
“See wide, far, deep! »

Then, somewhat suddenly, holiness arrived!

There are sometimes surprises in the Chapters... As we were reflecting on the orientations, the homily of the day – it was the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – focused on holiness. A brother took it up, making the link with the cause of beatification of Father d’Alzon, for whom holiness is a usual theme. And the Chapter followed. Some were surprised: the term risked sounding a bit 19th century, at the risk of only considering individual sanctification and asserting that religious people would be holier than others. But Vatican II rebalanced things by affirming the universal call to holiness. A call for all Christians... and why not us?

How to implement these guidelines?

Subsidiarity is also a key word of the Chapter! We did not want to offer turnkey things to do, but broad guidelines. To begin to make them your own, you have to agree to look at them with a new eye. Some will say: fraternity, holiness, mission, formation, nothing new, we have already talked about it... and they are right. But that should not prevent us from looking at it afresh, in our current context. ■

Why did the Chapter retain the four orientations (1) which summarize its work?

Discerning the main directions for the next six years took time: it was only at the beginning of the last week that the Chapter wanted to see things more clearly. Between all the possible directions, it was necessary to put into a hierarchy, prioritize and... decide. They must be broad enough to be able to be applied by all the Provinces and we have decided to choose four.

The word “fraternity” often came up in discussions...

It is experienced at different levels: in our communities; at the Assumption where we are brothers because “*spiritual sons*” of Father d’Alzon; with the laity. We also realized that this fraternity is wounded. When the brothers and lay people of the Province of Africa present to you the daily

violence which devastates North Kivu, or when our American brothers evoke the recent founding of El Paso, welcoming migrants who cross the border, we can only be touched. What if our mission was to live this fraternity? The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* is not far away...

The Chapter also insisted on formation.

It arrived quite naturally in the debates. A look at the figures of our congregation and the recent foundations is enough to convince oneself that it must be a priority, especially since we have spoken a lot about Father d’Alzon and the transmission of the charism.

(1) Read “Four calls for the Kingdom event”, in AA Info n° 1 (July 2023), p. 11

**Fr. Alberto Toutin (Superior General of the Picpusians)
Facilitator of the 34 General Chapter:
*“Continually return to this source of renewal”***



How did you experience these 25 days of immersion in the Assumptionist “bath”?

I received the invitation to participate in your General Chapter as a gesture of trust and fraternity. This allowed me to enter into the internal “kitchen” of life in your Assumption family, what drives you, your spirituality, the challenges you have faced. You made the charisma of Father d’Alzon contemporary to me through the meetings, the time of sharing, prayer and discernment during this Chapter.

What moments marked you the most?

First, the process of election of your new general government: this election says a lot, not only about the change of center of the Congregation, from the North and from Europe to the South, but above all about the recognition of the forms of live the charisma and skills that are present almost everywhere, in an increasingly interdependent congregation.

The other important moment was around what you call your “mobilizing works”. This notion retains all its relevance in my eyes, insofar as it draws attention to a point which seems essential to you in the mission of the Assumption today, for example the works of the ‘Mission d’Orient’, so dear to your family and so urgent today. However, the notion also involves a challenge: that of effectively “mobilizing”, where you are, the values or apostolic options which are embodied in certain mobilizing works. I think, for example, of the work for justice and peace in North Kivu and its impact elsewhere, whether in El Paso (Texas) or in the academic options at Worcester.

Were there any options or decisions from the Chapter that seemed important to you?

In my opinion, the key issue was to place the entire Chapter in the perspective of the coming of the Kingdom of God. By doing this, you help religious life to move away from a certain discourse which remains programmatic of the signs of the Kingdom of God and you dare to “connect” it to what contributes to its advent. This involves decisions on the composition of the new general government, the reshuffling of your animation structures as well as the options for apostolic and missionary formation. So continually return to this source of renewal: it is your contribution, as a missionary body, to the coming of the Kingdom of God. ■



Agnès Vololoniaina (Madagascar), Lay Member of the Alliance

“A spirit of unity is strong”.



What was the experience of the lay members of the Chapter?

The Chapter began for us upon our reception of the documents and the first phases of preparation: this made it easier for us to become integrated in the atmosphere of the Chapter. The smiles of those around us made us want to get involved! During the Chapter, I was particularly moved by the times of prayer: it was the first time that I had ever sung in Swahili or Vietnamese, not that it was a problem, thanks to the spirit that permeated among us.

During our week of participation, we (the lay members) felt a true spirit of unity in the Assumptionist life. There was no distance or differences in our realization of the same vision: “The Kingdom of God is near.” Our presence and our ideas were valued by the congregation. We must extend our thanks to the congregation for having given us the opportunity to live in this moment!

***How did the lay receive the capitulatory orientations that directly concerned them?**

The irreversibility of the Alliance inspires us to commit ourselves to thinking in a big way and for the future, to deepen and explore with all our beings the charism of the Assumption according to our Way of Life. The International Commission of the Lay-Religious Alliance can perhaps follow up with the acts of the Chapter for all the Provinces.

Lastly, the definition of the Lay Assumptionist became an object of discussion, which is not finished. The definition that was provided by the 2011 General Chapter needs to be expanded and clarified.

***Will this Chapter change your personal connection with the Assumption?**

It has given me many ideas and inspires me to take greater responsibility to carry a multidimensional development among the lay members and in the congregation. For example, I want to put into place, or continue to follow, a plan of formation. Furthermore, the daily prayer of the Assumption is essential in reinforcing our spiritual lives. Concerning pastoral life, I am inspired to develop actions around family visits in the parish to share the gospel and our spirituality. From an economic standpoint, the lay can contribute in helping reduce the tasks of the religious by lending a helping hand in preparing rooms in a guest house. The lay can also use their talents in the formation of youth. Personally, I am also concerned about the retirement of elderly religious: as a manager, I am ready to contribute my skills. ■

Afrique :

“Witnessing to the proximity of the Kingdom of God”

Speaking of the Provincial and General Chapters, I have a feeling of gratitude for the work done by the capitulants who gave specifications to our animators in the Congregation for the next six years. The Assumption has not said its last word!

The General Chapter was well received in the Province, thanks to the restitutions in retreat and in the Chapter of application. Retreatants and capitulants gave thanks for the Spirit's choice of brothers from countries to which consecrated life is currently shifting: four members of the CGO out of five. This is the opportunity for initiation into the leadership desired in Chapter. This invites us to readjust our life and our mission to bear witness to the proximity of the Kingdom. The final text is expected to enliven our common life with a view to better commitment in the Province.

Seven steps further

Our Provincial Chapter, placed under the theme “Witnessing to Christ today in the Province of Africa”, made reminders and further steps:

1. Calls to be witnesses of the **proximity of the Kingdom of God** and prophets of hope in a divided world.

2. Calls addressed to the **religious and laity of the Alliance**, to welcome the advent of the Kingdom in order to become saints following Father d'Alzon.



3. Calls to make **our charism** a force of inspiration for life in community for religious people, and in families for our lay brothers and sisters, the Alliance being a sign of proximity to the Kingdom. Our life will be driven by the values of subsidiarity, transversality, availability and interdependence in our common life. Why not think of joint works between lay and religious people?

4. The **economy** calls us to further cultivate love of work, responsible administration, rigorous control of accounts and the sharing of goods in solidarity.

5. The **formation** will root the young people in the charism and strengthen the knowledge of D'Alzon and Augustin. This will make our houses of formation places of learning gestures and words which allow us to speak God to the men and women of our time.

We must train experts in various fields of apostolate.

6. The growth of the **Vicariate of Kinshasa** and the **Vice-Province of East Africa** will be the concern of the entire body of the Province of Africa; sign of solidarity and synodality.

7. Making **Kivu** a priority, which will become a mobilizing work, is a sign of proximity to the Kingdom. This commits the Province to making its contribution to the cause of peace, the promotion of justice and the defense of the integrity of creation in Congo.

Up and forward, sons and daughters of the Assumption, to bear witness to the proximity of the Reign of God in our Africa!

Fr. Ephrem
KASEREKA KAPITULA
(1st Provincial Assistant, Butembo)

Europe :

“Consolidate, develop and expand what already exists”



The Chapter of Application of the Province of Europe took place from August 18 to August 26 at Valpré, in a spirit of great interculturality and in a hot climate: the temperature hovered around 40 degrees Celsius (104 F) throughout the Chapter. The group was visibly younger and more diverse than previous Chapters, a sign that the Province’s vitality is growing outside Europe.

The texts of the 34th General Chapter were well received. The brothers who had participated were satisfied with the resulting product, and the other capitulants recognized the fruits of their efforts. The work of the Provincial Chapter was supported, and the participants didn’t

waste time almost to the point of stating the “next steps” requested by the General Chapter.

Most propositions were written as a continuation. The aim is to consolidate, develop and grow what already exists. For example, to bring in more young people, the Chapter asked to create and develop a digital media presence for the world of the young. Concerning the Mission of the Orient, serious work is required to make as many brothers as possible aware of the essential reality of the Assumption. This could take place through production of multimedia content, for example, or by sending brothers in formation for a time of internship in these communities.

Five axes of apostolic priorities

Instead of talking about the “mobilizing works”, the Chapter preferred defining five “axes of apostolic priorities”: pilgrimages, media, Mission of the Orient, solidarity with the poor, and the beatification of Fr. d’Alzon. Referring to the Lay-Religious Alliance, the Chapter insisted on the importance of common missions and on the formation that is necessary for the religious and lay, inviting certain lay members to begin a theological formation.

Beyond these examples, two themes were considered over others during the Chapter: the formation and the transmission

of the charism. The text on formation, one of the longest, contains many concrete propositions; this shows that formation in the Province is not standard, but additionally that we have a desire to be well-formed missionary disciples. The Chapter emphasizes the importance of forming the formators, leaders, and brothers toward specific Assumptionist apostolates or other lay disciplines, or economic affairs. The Chapter asks that during the first years of formation, the brothers take a pause in their academic studies to begin an apostolic period of one or two years in another community. It also insisted again on the necessity of learning another of the official languages of the Congregation besides the language of their studies.

The transmission of the charism

The other point of insistence was the transmission of the charism. The capitulants emphasized the importance and their desire to return to the source of our charism to better understand it and to inculcate it. The Chapter encourages the Province to have certain religious specialize in studies of St. Augustine, Fr. d'Alzon, and the history of the Congregation. It proposes to make multimedia supports incorporating resources and making them available to larger numbers. It suggests a center of Augustinian and d'Alzonian resources (a name to be determined), that would gather specialists of diverse disciplines, either interns or externs of the Assumption: historians, formators, theologians, etc.

A full program, certainly a sign of the breath of the Spirit, and of the vitality of the Assumptionist body!

Fr. Viktors JERMAKOVICS
(Assistant Provincial, Paris)



A New Provincial

Born in 1973 in Belgium, Fabien Lejeusne was baptized at 18 and pronounced his first vows seven years later. Formed in the seminaries of Lille and Issy-les-Moulineaux, he was ordained to the priesthood in 2003. A large part of his ministry has been dedicated to youth. He served as chaplain to several colleges and schools in Montpellier (Her-

ault), as well as in scouting, where he was a local, diocesan, and national leader (in the branch "Compagnons" of Scouts and Leaders of France) until 2015. From 2012 to 2017, he was director of the National Pilgrimage to Lourdes. For the past six years he has been Vicar General for the Province of Europe.



A new Provincial Council

Fr. Fabien LEJEUSNE, Provincial Superior
Fr. Mihai Iulian DANCĂ, First Assistant and Provincial Vicar
Fr. Pierre CAO BÁ Vĩnh, Assistant and Provincial Treasurer
Fr. Viktors JERMAKOVICS, Provincial Assistant
Fr. Vivien DOKOUI, Provincial Assistant

East Africa :

« *Rekindle and reinvigorate our passion for the Kingdom* »

Our Vice-Provincial Chapter thought broadly about how to respond to the call of the General Chapter in the manner of 'we have to think globally and act locally.'

Reception of the fruits of the 34th General Chapter

We are operating in a world in crisis ranging from personal (psycho-spiritual and emotional), social, economic, political, environmental, technological and even institutional and ecclesiastical crises. This may lead to a kind of fatalism, meaninglessness and desperation.

However, God is not all absent in the world. He is still present in us so that we can make him present to the world. The unwanted global crisis is for us an assignment to rebuild the Kingdom of God. The context in which we operate today should only make us aware of God sending us anew to ourselves and to the world. To ourselves, he indicates that there is no way out except through reliance on him. To the world, He invites us to present His Kingdom in proclaiming the message of hope.

Making «further steps» in the Vice-Province

After reviewing and evaluating our life as a Vice-Province since 2019, we cannot be passive only for the crises to eventually engulf us. The Chapter exhorted us to rekindle and reinvigorate our passion for the Kingdom. Even in the midst of secularism as well as different forms of challenges, the

Chapter made in-depth reflection on rekindling our desire for sanctity, our fraternity, our efforts to surpass our current resources, and our creativity to overcome the current global crisis.

The main decisions of the Chapter

- Dispose ourselves to personal transformation in fidelity to our Christian call and Religious consecration. A life of fidelity and prayer, integral spiritual accompaniment and taking time to relearn so as to develop and update our ideas.

- Impartation of the knowledge of our Charism and deepening of the Assumptionist Spirituality to religious and those with whom we get into contact especially in our institutions, family and friends, parishes and other areas of apostolate.

- Boosting of education as one of our identities. It considered our institutions to be centres for the growth of faith in a world that is being rapidly secularized.

- Combine our efforts through pooling and sharing of information and other resources as well as exploiting all our available resources. There will be economic formation sessions as well as investment for the economic sustainability of the Vice Province.

- Creativity in mission. Our apostolate will continue to be rooted in our Charism with the testimony of our daily life characterized by a spirit of commitment, responsibility, teamwork and collaboration. It will be driven by pastoral



plans, implementation of the annual Assumptionists Youth Day and Family ministry apostolate and respond to apostolic calls to mission in different dioceses.

- Continue Jesus' ministry of transforming creation and lifting people's living standards by being compassionate towards the victims of violence and environmental crises.

- The digital world as an opportunity for evangelization. Using the media as a means of evangelization, we are to develop our apostolic field of mass media to reach the youth in their world.

- The Lay of the Alliance will participate directly in the formation of the Religious by a course on *Lay-Religious Alliance*, emotional maturity and sexual integration etc. They will also engage in pastoral activities. The chapter invited them to participate in the new foundations and encouraged formation of more lay fraternities. Each Lay Fraternity will be attached to its nearest community.

Fr. Dominic KAMAU MUTURI
(1st Provincial Assistant, Nairobi)



Madagascar : « *Actualizing our charism so that it grows here* »

The Chapter of Application for Madagascar was held in Toliara from August 27 to September 2. Assisted by two religious delegates and two lay delegates who had participated in the General Chapter, the capitulants were able to garner the fruits of that Chapter. The capitulants were guided by the texts to help them with their decision-making for the Province.

What “extra steps” are needed in this province? The Assumption in Madagascar has been in place for 70 years. The capitulants were animated by one conviction: take care of the Assumption that has been implanted in Madagascar. The texts of the General Chapter help the Province to safeguard the patrimony received by the Venerable Father Emmanuel d’Alzon and help to actualize the charism so that it will grow in this land.

Enlightened by the Chapter, the Province takes its provincial responsibilities seriously and its role in the Congregation as



“one body”. The texts emphasize the international scope of the Assumption in Madagascar.

The Chapter has decided on two main focal points for the Province:

- Education is indispensable for the development of Madagascar, especially in the areas where the Assumption is most present. Our schools are a vital need in this region, which has been neglected in schooling and education. The schools are a means to live religious values amid a population that is mainly non-Christian. The text of the General Chapter on education motivates the Province to reinforce its engagement in this domain, which is part of Assumption’s heritage and identity.

- Justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC): Here too, the text of the 34th General Chapter has helped the Province of Madagascar to become more aware of the task the Assumption faces concerning corruption, social injustice and ecological instability in the country.

In a broader sense, the Province should work as a network with the Assumption family and civic organizations, to enable men and women to enjoy their dignity of having been created in God’s image and likeness.

It is now up to the local chapters to define a way of life that promotes a culture of respect and protection for the environment. Even the text on economy emphasizes ecological and environmental issues.

Fr. Étienne Ratalata **RAFANAMBINANTSOA**
(Assistant General, Rome)

North America :

« *The General Chapter helped us approach our work with both faith and creativity* »



For five days, at the end of August (19th to 24th), religious and lay delegates of the Province gathered in Cuernavaca, Mexico, for the second session of our Provincial Chapter, in order to respond to decisions and orientations provided by the Congregation’s General Chapter.

Our work began with a morning of prayer, reflection and conversation, sparked by the retreat at the General Chapter on the Chapter’s theme, *“The Kingdom of God is Near,”* and by the part of the Chapter’s Orientation Text on

“Living the Fraternity of the Kingdom as a Path to Holiness.” Are we called “to move mountains” or “to live our vocation as religious where we are?” Do I know how to be a Kingdom presence where I am?

We were reminded of d’Alzon’s vision of the Kingdom, and grateful for the grace to embody that vision in our world and in our time with hope, confidence, fidelity, and patience. *“When you’re Father d’Alzon and you’re ready to make the extension of Christ’s reign in your souls and in the world your*

fourth vow (cf. ES 647), it can never be out of mere excess or exaltation of circumstance, but because at the root of it all, you yourself are completely caught up in the presence of the Kingdom.” Father Iulian provided us with a fresh and inspiring look at our Founder, urging us to think in terms of time (the “Reign” of God) rather than space (the “Kingdom”), and inviting us to a renewed hope in God’s active presence in our own day. The General Chapter helped us approach our work with both faith and creativity.



Father Chi Ai Nguyen, recently named Provincial of the North American Province, presided over our deliberations, but launched the work by a reflection on leadership. This was the opportunity for him to propose a team with which he would work in Provincial Council and to present brothers who would be responsible for formation and for financial administration. Many young brothers in the Province have been called to serve in leadership roles, whether at the service of the Province or of various apostolates. This will be a learning experience for many but an opportunity as well for fresh thinking about our life and work.

At the Chapter, we then set to work on a number of topics that had already been identified at our first session in January, but we looked at these in light of what was said in Rome during the month of June. These topics included Mission, Fraternal Life, the Lay-Religious alliance, Formation, Vocation Ministry, Community Organization and Finances. We tried to reflect on all of these topics in the spirit of the General Chapter's Orientation text and its four calls: to brotherhood, mission, formation and holiness. The call to be missionary disciples wherever we serve, to do this as brothers and in collaboration with our lay members, and to share the charism of the Assumption with young people—these are the renewed commitments to which the Provincial Chapter of 2023 has called us.

Fr. Richard LAMOUREUX
(Worcester, USA)

A new Provincial Superior

Fr. Chi Ai Nguyen was appointed as the new Provincial Superior of the North America Province for three years, starting from July 15, 2023.

Fr. Chi Ai was born and grew up in Vietnam. During his College years, he received a full scholarship to study in Moscow, at Pushkin University. There, he met the Assumptionists and decided to join them in 2002. He was then sent to France where he started his novitiate in 2004. In 2009, he earned a B.A. in Theology at the Catholic University of Paris.

After six years in Paris, he went to Quebec, Canada,



where he continued his study in Theology at Laval University. Chi Ai received a Ph.D. in biblical studies in 2015. The same year he was ordained to the priesthood. After six years in Canada, he joined the Assumption University community and has lived at Emmanuel House since 2016. He has been teaching at the Theology department from 2017 to 2023.



A new Provincial Council

Rev. Chi Ai NGUYEN, Provincial Superior,
Rev. Dennis GALLAGHER, First Assistant,
Rev. José-Miguel DÍAZ AYLLON, Second Assistant,
Rev. Rodel SAPALO CERVANTES, Third Assistant,
Provincial Treasurer

A word from an “outgoing” and an “incoming” Assistant...

The General Chapter always brings about a more or less extensive renewal of the international team leading the Congregation from Rome. We interviewed a member of the former Curia after 12 years with the OCG, and his successor as Vicar General in the new team.



Fr. Marcelo Marciel (Andean Province), former Vicar General:

“Put your trust in the Lord”

If I had to express in one sentence what these 12 years of service to the congregation as Assistant and Vicar General have meant for me, I’d say they’ve been a leap of faith. Perhaps it would take a little longer to be able to sum up, with some hindsight, what I’ve experienced, but, put simply, every day in the service of the congregation was for me a continual marvel at God’s action in the lives of my brothers, with their strengths and frailties, and especially in this latter dimension, helping us to live as faithfully as possible the vocation awarded to us by the Lord.

The experience was marked by mutual listening and by the firm conviction that we cannot keep Christ at the center of our lives at the Assumption if we neglect to build a fraternal community.

Three experiences have left a deep mark on me. The first concerns my own growth and maturing as an Assumptionist religious: today I feel more of an Assumptionist because I’ve come to understand that the international and intercultural dimension of our family is a kind of mosaic of which I knew only a few tesserae; today the overall image appears more manifest to me; and I’m happy with what I see, not because it were the most beautiful image that exists, but because we have arranged it together, and that’s the reason for all its worth.

The second experience was the accompaniment of Adelard, a young Congolese religious from the Congregation of the Brothers of the Assumption, who died after a brief and painful illness as he was finishing his studies as a trainer of formators at the Gregorian University: for our community, brothers and sisters alike, it was a powerful stimulus to a genuine display of love and charity, each of us accepting his role with generosity and

responsibility, from the youngest to the oldest one. Adelard was God's gentle breeze blowing through our house and leaving to us a spiritual legacy in the form of the words "Thank you", he repeated endlessly.

The third experience was the foundation in Angola, together with the Brazilian and African provinces and the Brazilian Congregation of the Auxiliary Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. That missionary adventure was very complex and I sometimes felt very tired and frustrated; but the Lord leads us along unforeseen paths and surprises us when we least expect it, and I feel grateful for having contributed my grain of sand to this much-loved mission.

Everything I've experienced over the years has been an opportunity to commit myself completely, learning from others at every moment, and letting myself be accompanied by the experience of so many brothers who, all along, guided and supported me in this service.

One thing that proved very difficult, but undoubtedly worthwhile, was the work on vocations ministry. As Father Benoît Grière wrote in one of his letters on this subject, we must thank all those who cast their nets and often catch nothing, but who nevertheless are constant and, in the name of the Lord, cast their nets again.

If I were to give any advice to the new Council, it would simply be that they put their trust in the Lord; only in this way is it possible to accompany the different realities of our religious family: the more ardent our love for the Lord and for our brothers, the more intense will be our yearning for the coming of the Kingdom, as befits true sons of Emmanuel d'Alzon. ■



Fr. Benoît Bigard (Province of Europe), new Vicar General:

“Continuously reworking our fraternity”

What are your first impressions as General Assistant?

Arriving in this position after six years of service as Provincial, and having also participated in eleven Plenary General Councils, I approach this new service with great continuity and without too much apprehension. On the other hand, I greatly appreciated, during my years as provincial, the good understanding and good collaboration within the Provincial Council. However, for several weeks, I have also found this good understanding and this good collaboration at a general level: I am therefore confident that we will be able to carry out the mission entrusted to us together, calmly.

What are your expectations in your new mission?

The General Chapter reminds us that *“in recent years we have grown in the development of the unity of our body, in co-responsibility, in subsidiarity and solidarity within our Congregation thanks to the CGP, the CEC, the CIFA, the General Secretariat for Formation.”* I therefore sincerely hope to be able to contribute to continuing and developing this path of co-responsibility, subsidiarity and solidarity within the congregation and allowing *“further steps”* in the projects entrusted to me.

What feature of the 34th General Chapter seems to you to be privileged?

In the logic of what I have just mentioned, it seems essential to me to take care of our co-responsibility, our networking (religious and lay people), our positive interdependence in the service of the Mission. What kills religious life, like our societies elsewhere, are: everyone for themselves, misplaced personal ▶



The new General Curia, elected by the 34th General Chapter.

ambitions, careerism, jealousy, forgetting our destiny in God... We must therefore constantly rework our fraternity, as an effective sign (sacrament) of the Kingdom. This universal fraternity to which we are called is a response to war, injustice, poverty, migration and even secularization. Cf. the title of the Chapter's orientation text: *"Living the fraternity of the Kingdom as a path to holiness!"*

What word or quote from Saint Augustine or Father d'Alzon could inspire you in your new responsibility?

"O God! My last hour may come soon. What state will I find myself in? What talents, put to good use, could I present to you? What virtues increased, what heroic sacrifices, what good works accumulated? This is what you expected from me; and, because I abused your graces, alas! my hands are empty! Forgive me, Lord, and allow me to take advantage of the days that remain to me, and, by a redoubled fervor, to benefit all the more from the last graces that you still offer me, the more I have abused them until now." Emmanuel d'Alzon, "The abuse of graces" (ES p.334). ■

Distribution of tasks between Assistants:

A - Sharing of territories:

- **Africa:** Étienne
- **Europe:** Ngoa
- **Latin America** (Brazil + Andean Prov.): João
- **Madagascar:** Thierry
- **East Africa + North America:** Benoît.

B - Thematic follow-ups:

- **Education:** Thierry
- **Youth & Vocations:** Étienne
- **Archives & Library:** Étienne
- **Lay-Religious Alliance:** João

- **Protection of minors and vulnerable people:** Thierry (+ Benoît)
- **JPIC:** João
- **Communication & digital world** (media): Benoît
- **Formation (in connection with the SGF):** Benoît
- **Ecumenism - interreligious dialogue - Mission of the East:** Michel
- **CEC & economic questions:** Alex.

Two new « heads » for our Sisters

The Oblates of the Assumption and the Orantes of the Assumption have both recently held their General Chapters and have elected new general curia. We have interviewed them here.



Sister Zoé Vandermersch Superior General of the Oblates of the Assumption

What were the focal points of your General Chapter? What was the result?

One of the many challenges of the Chapter was to discover new ways to discern in community, by moving away from debate and confrontation to enter discussion on three levels: personal meditation of the Word of God, “spiritual conversation” in small groups and returning to the plenary group to elicit consensus (based on the ESDAC method: “Spiritual Exercises for apostolic discernment in common”). It is

a similar method to that of the Synod on Synodality! I am proud that our congregation is in line with the Universal Church, and I can assure everyone that this method bears fruit! We have lived a true experience of synodality, and we felt the spirit of “oneness”. The words “communion”, “participation”, and “mission” really took hold for us. The theme of the Chapter was the wedding feast of Cana, and we lived an experience of transformation: when we listen to the Word of God, of the Spirit that

seeks to penetrate each of us, the wine flows freely. . .

What are the consequences of the Chapter for the life of the congregation and its relations within the Assumption family?

For the first time, some laity participated in our Chapter (during the 1st week), and we held a videoconference with the laity from different countries. This was an initial event begun to inspire our laity, taking into ▶



consideration their needs for formation, for transmission, and for experiencing the charism. I sincerely hope that our “d’Alzonian Fraternity” will develop thanks to this new venture! As for the Assumption Family, our Chapter confirmed the importance of collaboration between us in our various missions. This should confirm and reinforce our relationships.

Is there a theme or objective that you will focus on in a special way, as the new Superior General?

Four calls from the Lord emerged from our Chapter, which will become projects for our Congregation:

Put Christ at the center of our lives;

Live and share the charism with the lay;

Engage in a culture of peace and ecological change;

Become missionaries, wherever we are sent.

These goals are very important and complementary. Personally, to put them into action, I hope to emphasize formation at all levels, notably theological formation; on practicing interculturality, a real challenge in our missionary Congregation; and on implementing a synodal style, including in governance.

A new Superior General

Born almost 50 years ago in the North of France, Sr. Zoe felt a call to religious life at an early age, at Lourdes. After studies in Paris and England, she realized her vocation in the house of studies for the Oblates of Lille, while preparing to teach. After pronouncing first vows in 2000, she became a literature teacher and engaged in youth ministry at Segré (while studying theology at Angers), and in Nîmes. In 2016, she returned to Lille and served as chaplain for students at the Catholic University:



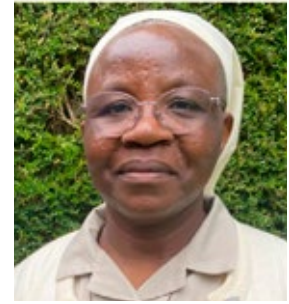
seven wonderful years among the young, while also serving the Province as a Council member and Provincial Secretary, from 2020 to 2023. Last July 11, she was elected Superior General of the congregation succeeding Sr. Felicia Ghiorghies.



A new General Curia

- Sr Zoé VANDERMERSCH, Superior General;
- Sr Théodosie KITWANA MINEENE, Assistant General;
- Sr Sandrine DEMOURY, Council member and Secretary General;
- Sr Léa KAVUGHO PALUKU, General Council member;
- Sr Aparecida de Fátima SILVA DE CARVALHO, General Council member;
- Sr Dominique BOUWENS, General Treasurer.

Sister Masika Tasiviwe Marie-Jeanne Superior General of the Orantes of the Assumption



A new Superior General

Born in 1965 in Luotu (North Kivu, D.R. Congo), Sr Marie-Jeanne took her first vows in 1990. She served six years as Regional Superior Major in the DRC, then twelve years as General Councillor: a member of the outgoing Curia, she was then Assistant General, responsible in particular for planning studies. On July 16, she was elected Superior General of her congregation, succeeding Sr Anne Huyghebaert.



A new General Curia

Sr Marie-Jeanne MASIKA
TASIVIWE, Superior General ;
Sr Thérèse KASOKI MUTANJI,
General Assistant and General
Secretary;
Sr Marie-Nicole RAIMBERT,
General Councillor;
Sr Edwige MWAHULUA SIHEYA,
General Councillor;
Sr Philippine RAVAONANDRASANA
NOMENJANAHARY, General
Treasurer.

What were the issues of your General Chapter? And what was the main outcome?

There is a conviction that a charism---at its very core and in its actuality---speaks and is transmitted more through one's life rather than just through words. This is reinforced through our desire to review and, if necessary, adapt the lives of the Orantes in their diverse aspects. There is a need for a solid spirituality, a faithful dynamic in our intuitions and origins, and an interiority that is expected. Additionally, there should be cordiality in our relationships among our sisters, and with everyone, which is implied in this phrase from Augustine: "Have the root of love deep in your heart". 1 Jn.4.

I perceive an awareness strengthened by the importance of knowing the fundamental writings of the congregation and of deepening our roots in the tradition of a contemplative life to better live it in the world today. Furthermore, the attention to preserving the quality of relationships is crucial and to instilling with others the assurance of a good organization and a sound management at all levels. Points of attention were emphasized: interculturality; intergenerationality; formation that is personal and transformative; retention of Orantes in Europe but promoting diversity in cultures and continents of implantation. . .

What consequences will the Chapter have for the life of your Congregation and (if they take place) for the relations within the

Assumption Family?

The Chapter reaffirmed the actuality of our charism that puts contemplative life at the heart of the world and its primacy over all our preoccupations. It underlined the pressing necessity of nourishing it and preserving its various forms, including in or outside of the community. It reaffirmed that as contemplatives we believe that we don't normally create, or have social or apostolic works, but only the work that contributes to that of others.

We count on you to support our uniqueness---such that our common characteristics and our prayer for the Assumption remain our mission that we faithfully honor.

Is there a theme or objective that you will focus on in a special way, as the new Superior General?

One objective that moves me is a solid formation to confront the complexities of our time and to give credible responses to the many questions that are posed to us. This should be adhered to through understanding and deepening our charism to live it better. We also need to be trained professionally to develop the skills of our sisters and to help prepare them for work that is compatible with our contemplative life. . .

The life of the Orante always helps us to grow and become "contemplative women enriched by faith through prayer and contemplation; consecrated in a sisterly Augustinian community; visible to the heart of the world as witnesses of the Kingdom."

A founder, three popes and four bishops

The news of the Synod invites us to examine the relations of Father d'Alzon with his hierarchy: tireless quest for a synodal Church, modernity of his ministry as Vicar General, fertility of his charism in Nîmes.

On December 26, 1834, Prince Cardinal Charles Odescalchi (1), Archbishop of Ferrara, ordained the young Emmanuel d'Alzon to the priesthood in Rome. The ordinand had benefited from private lessons from renowned theologians: Cardinal Micara, the Dominican Olivieri, Father Ventura (2) and the future Cardinal Wiseman. Courted by dioceses as prestigious as Paris or Montpellier, Father d'Alzon chose to return to his diocese of origin and offered his services to Mgr de Chaffoy.

Mgr de Chaffoy: the bishop who attracts d'Alzon to Nîmes

At that time, Nîmes was a small and above all a very young diocese. After the French Revolution, everything remained to be done. Mgr Charles de Chaffoy worked successfully: creation of the minor and major seminaries, foundation of new parishes, reform of the liturgy, organization of a catechism for children and adults, opening of Catholic schools equipped with best teachers. Every year, he invited his priests to join him for a time of retreat. He had also set up a pension fund for priests and convened a diocesan synod in September 1835.

Such dynamism pleased D'Alzon. His friend Eugène de La Gournerie was surprised by his choice, because the bishop of Nîmes had publicly opposed Lamennais' ideas. But, knowing him well, he does not doubt his loyalty for a single moment: "Your submissive obedience to all his wishes can only give him a perfect idea of your feelings and your character." (3)

For his part, Mgr de Chaffoy received this young and brilliant 25-year-old priest as a gift from heaven! And named him honorary vicar general. It was time,



Portrait of Monseigneur Claude de Chaffoy , bishop of Nîmes from 1821 to 1837 by painter Numa Boucoiran. Nîmes, episcopal palace, home of the Musée du Vieux Nîmes

because "the next day, November 9, [...] Mgr de Chaffoy, an old man in his eighties, was struck by an attack of paralysis, which reduced him to physical impotence until his death. Deprived henceforth of the possibility of saying mass, he remained between life and death for quite a long time" (4). The bishop never recovered from this attack and was subsequently unable to exercise all his functions. But as the head was still functioning, he continued to lead the diocese until his death.

D'Alzon delivered his funeral eulogy on October 6, 1837. It shows all his esteem and even his affection for the prelate. An incident demonstrates that these feelings were mutual. During a political discussion, half serious and half pleasant, with Mgr de Chaffoy's own nephew, the two young men came to simulate a duel with canes in the middle of the episcopal salon. Far from being amused, Mgr de Chaffoy was very angry and asked the two young people to leave the place immediately, "which, like well-bred people, they did without saying a word". Seized with remorse, "Mgr de Chaffoy sent to his vicar general the magnificent ivory crucifix with Christ that he had on his desk. Father d'Alzon treasured this memory of the holy prelate until his death" (5).

His confidence in D'Alzon only grew over the months. He finally authorized him to launch the cycle of his conferences for the Protestants of Nîmes. He even approved of his idea of the Refuge. After his second request, he finally wrote the decree establishing "a house of refuge for girls who, repentant, want to return to God." Knowing his virtue, he knew he was capable of carrying out such a project: "Come on, my dear child; all founders are crazy and you have the character." (6) An old inn was rented on the road to Beaucaire and, after some necessary transformations, Mgr de Chaffoy came in person to bless the oratory and encourage the nuns as well as the repentants (7).

Mgr Cart: the bishop to convince

In contrast, the collaboration with his successor Mgr Jean-François Cart began on a regime of distrust. The new bishop opposed his plan to found a Con-



Mgr Jean-François-Marie Cart, Bishop of Nîmes from 1837 to 1855. Print from Franche-Comté (circa 1850)

gregation for a long time.

"Emmanuel," the bishop said to him one day, "I want you to report to me on your experience with this group" (8).

- But you have already met us, Monseigneur.

- I want a written report. »

When he had it in his hands, the bishop shook his head in disapproval.

- This is not very precise, he said acidly: don't you see that you are setting foot in a disproportionate enterprise?

A few days later, conversing with the novices, the bishop even uttered some very discouraging words.

- I will never allow you to take religious vows to form a congregation. I need you as priests of the diocese..." (9)

In fact, the bishop let it happen, without authorizing it. And within the limits of obedience, Father d'Alzon took advantage of his indecision to move forward with the project but without rushing it. The coldness of Mgr Cart took nothing away from the loyalty of the Founder towards his bishop. The latter, learning that he was promoted to archbishop of Aix, wrote to the nuncio in Paris to

1) Four years later, this prince of the Church renounced the cardinalate to enter as a simple religious in the Society of Jesus.

2) "I go quite often to Father Ventura, in whom I find immense talent, a lot of clarity, a lot of logic, a lot of memory and a lot of exaggeration."

(letter of March 31 to Luglien d'Esgrigny) His discernment is correct: Ventura will strongly oppose the pope in the movement of 1848. Banished from Rome, he knocks on the door of the college of Nîmes. Torn between gratitude for his former master and his loyalty to the bishop who cannot receive him, D'Alzon found him a discreet refuge in the neighboring diocese of Montpellier, where he took care to visit him regularly in his old age.

3) Siméon Vailhé, Emmanuel d'Alzon, volume 1, p. 97

4) Ibidem.

5) Siméon Vailhé, Emmanuel d'Alzon, volume 1, p. 110.

6) Id. p. 114.

7) The religious institute to which the Nîmes Refuge was entrusted was born in Bordeaux in 1815 under the name of the Servants of Jesus Christ, more commonly called the Sisters of Marie-Thérèse. The congregation still exists; in 2017, there were only four sisters in two houses.

8) The group in question was made up of Frs. Tissot, Surrel, Henri and Laurentin, and a lay teacher, René Cusse. Father d'Alzon officially entered the novitiate with them in the chapel of the College of Nîmes on Christmas night 1845.

9) Agustín Cabré, *La amena historia de un hombre en serio: Manuel d'Alzon fundador de los asuncionistas*, p. 73 (free translation). The description of the scene refers to the letter that Mgr Cart sent to d'Alzon on August 16, 1846.

oppose this departure and to say all the good things he thought of his bishop. The appointment decree was never signed and the appointment was simply forgotten. Mgr Cart was relieved and sincerely thanked Father d'Alzon for the interest he showed him.

Over the years, the tenacity of Father d'Alzon and his ability to overcome difficulties managed to break down the last reluctance of the bishop. In October 1849, he authorized a trial of novitiate for one year (10). And on December 25, 1851, he allowed the perpetual profession of the first Assumptionists. Mgr Cart began to fear that the emerging work and Father d'Alzon himself would leave Nîmes. In fact, the director of the Stanislas College urged the Founder to transfer the Assomption College to Paris, where Mother Marie-Eugénie wanted it to be established. And already the diocese of Montpellier was reaching out to him. But even more than Mgr Cart, Father d'Alzon cared about Nîmes. No doubt he also thought that you could not close and reopen a college like you fold and unfold a deck of cards.

In 1855, Father d'Alzon was sent to Rome by Mgr Cart to report on the situation in the diocese. He stayed at the French Seminary, opened in 1853 by the Spiritans, whose creation he had had and supported. He is received by Pius IX at Castel Gandolfo. On his return to Nîmes, Mgr Cart was dying. Surrounded by the city's clergy, Father d'Alzon gave him Extreme Unction then presided over his funeral, alongside the Archbishop of Avignon. The canons elected him as head of the diocese while waiting for the government to appoint his successor and obtain the approval of the Pope.

Public rumor already announc-

es his appointment to the head of the diocese of Nîmes. D'Alzon was preparing to renounce the episcopate once again, when Mgr Henri Plantier was appointed: 42 years old, professor of Hebrew in Lyon, fiery preacher. But Father d'Alzon is on his guard, because the new bishop of Nîmes is also a fervent defender of Gallican ideas.

Mgr Plantier, converted by D'Alzon to unity in Rome

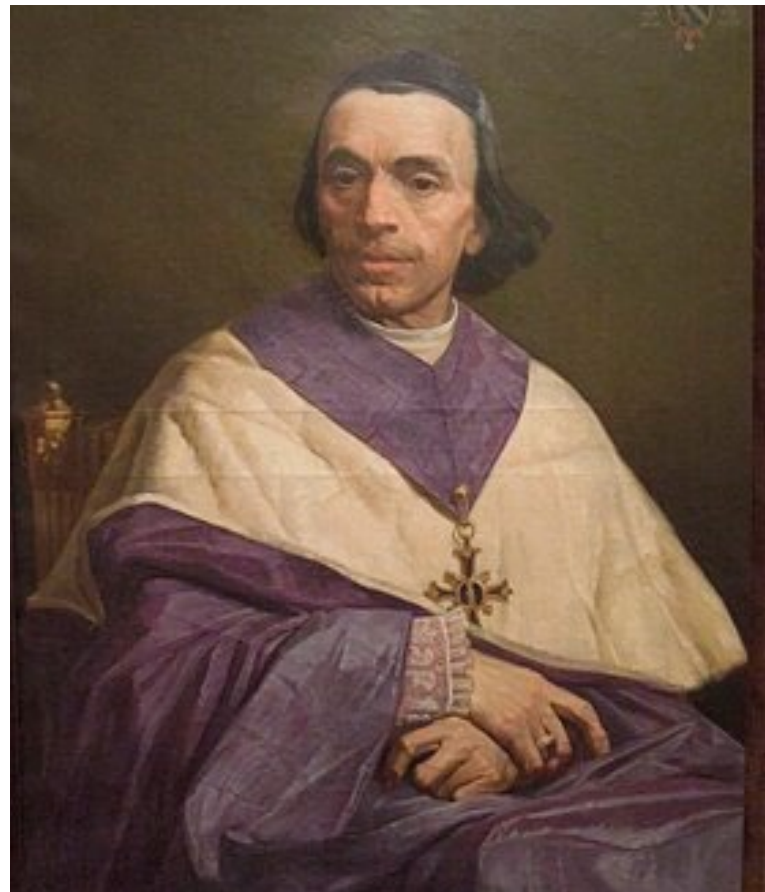
Also, when Mgr Plantier wanted to keep him as Vicar General, he politely declined this offer, claiming an overload of work linked to the beginnings of the congregation. The bishop insisted and D'Alzon ended up agreeing to remain at his side: *"We must love the Church of God for Our Lord, and not because we*

would find a little satisfaction in making our own ideas triumph. » (letter to Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, September 8, 1855)

For his part, Mgr Plantier shows himself ready to make many concessions: *"We will give you the freedom to devote to your work all the care and all the time that it will require (...) I prefer to have you in even a limited capacity than not having you at all, and if, to have you as holder, I must stipulate your independence, I submit to this condition, despite the harsh deprivation that it will impose on me."* (11)

Admirable humility and greatness of soul of these two great servants of the Church, who seem to agree in advance on the fact that they will not always agree.

Mgr Claude Henri Augustin Plantier, Bishop of Nîmes from 1855 to 1875 by painter Melchior Doze. Palais épiscopal, Musée du Vieux Nîmes



Over the months, Father d'Alzon has the joy of seeing Mgr Plantier move from Gallican ideas, aimed at separatism of the Church of France, to ultramontanism, the party of unity and loyalty to the pope. : *"You will perhaps hear the Bishop of Nîmes spoken of as a Gallican. I beg you to say that he is doing more for us than his predecessor had done, and that, all in all, the reforms he is bringing to his diocese are very ultramontane,"* he wrote to François Picard, then a student at Rome, May 29, 1856.

A year later, on May 1, 1857, Picard shared good news with D'Alzon: the pope had just recognized the congregation through the decree of praise (12). After three tough years marked by illness and the financial setbacks of the college, this approval from Rome suddenly gave wings to Father d'Alzon. He no longer thought of merging the congregation with others, which could have led to its premature disappearance, but began to survey the dioceses of France and sent missionaries to Australia: Brs. Tissot and Cusse traveled for three months by boat to Brisbane to answer Mgr Quin's call.

Working on good terms with his vicar, Mgr Plantier no longer hides his satisfaction: *"How happy we are in Nîmes, despite our little secret wounds! It is one of the most consoling dioceses in France, and I hope, with a little time, to make its clergy the most honorable of our great Church."* (13) Despite the reluctance, he was able to impose common life on priests and vicars and an annual check of the knowledge of young priests, chaired by Father d'Alzon himself, to help them live their ministry better.

Appointed theologian to the bishops of Nîmes and Montau-

ban during the First Vatican Council, Father d'Alzon stayed there from November 6, 1869 to July 18, 1870, the day of the proclamation of papal infallibility. In the meantime, Mgr Plantier fell seriously ill. Forced to keep the room then return to Nîmes, he appointed D'Alzon prosecutor on April 16, thus allowing him to take part in the work and ceremonies of the council. But, according to Siméon Vailhé, he only appeared there once *"on July 18, 1870, lost in the anonymous crowd of faithful, and radiant, like it, to hear the definition of the infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiff"* (14).

How to explain this discretion? It was first imposed by the functioning of the council. Then, it did not prevent Father d'Alzon from exercising a constant influence by being very active outside the conciliar assembly: his 400 letters written at this time give a precise idea of his schedule and especially of his role. To replace Bishop Plantier, d'Alzon joined a committee of strategists responsible for defending the infallibility of the pope and his independence from civil powers. His opponents compared him to the "carriage fly". He excelled in the art of stirring up debates and ignored nothing of what was said in the conciliar assembly. D'Alzon had undoubtedly received a special mission from above (from very influential cardinals) or even from very high (or even from the Pope himself).

A note dated December 4, 1869, addressed to the Oblates, sets out the guiding ideas that he intended to defend at the Council: *"By carefully studying the goal of the Council, we see that we propose above all to re-establish the entire supernatural order*

brought by Our Lord on earth. It is attacked by disbelief, naturalism, rationalism and socialism. To unbelief, we want to oppose the principles of faith; to naturalism, the whole plan of supernatural help and supernatural hopes; to rationalism, the unshakable basis of divine authority, fortified by the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope; to socialism, the more perfect notion of social principles, as communicated by the great Christian society, the Church." (15)

Mgr Plantier's health never really recovered. In May 1874, it was so compromised that only a miracle could save it. Informed by Mgr de Cabrières, the bishop of Montpellier, Pius IX sent Father d'Alzon a memorable tele- ▶

10) Father d'Alzon was then surrounded by Henri Brun, Victor Cardenne, Hyppolyte Saugrain and Étienne Pernet. None of those who had started the experiment in 1845 were present.

11) Letter of September 24, 1855 from Mgr Plantier to Father d'Alzon, Cf intelligence note in *E. d'Alzon - Lettres 1855-1856*, p. 153-154.

12) The decree of approval emanating from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and definitively approving the Assumptionists dates from November 6, 1864. It was addressed to Mgr Plantier during a visit to Rome. Father d'Alzon learned of it on his return on February 21, 1865.

13) Letter from Mgr Plantier to Father d'Alzon dated February 12, 1857, Siméon Vailhé, *Emmanuel d'Alzon*, volume 2, p. 8.

14) Siméon Vailhé, *Emmanuel d'Alzon*, volume 2, p. 226.

15) Id. p. 228.

16) Id. p. 270.

17) Id. p. 306.

18) Id. p. 307.

19) Id. p. 206.

gram: *"Pope gives you the mission to prevent Henri (Plantier) from lavishing his forces without measure, sends you praise and blessings."* (16) But Plantier was not a man to spare himself. After an improvement - a grace that Father d'Alzon had requested from Lourdes - he relapsed. Despite the support of Father d'Alzon and the care of the brothers and Oblates, he died peacefully in his chair, without agitation or movement, on May 25, 1875.

Mgr Besson, the bishop who did not want to see Father d'Alzon retire

Father d'Alzon begged his successor Mgr François Besson, appointed on September 3, 1875, to extend his functions for only three months, time to iron out the first difficulties of the office of the new bishop of Nîmes. By tacit agreement, this time was extended. Two years later, D'Alzon renewed his request, orally and in writing, but was again rejected. Bishop Besson wanted him to accompany him on the diocesan pilgrimage to Rome, certain that his knowledge of pontifical circles would give him a kind welcome:

"In fact, nothing can describe his astonishment when, in a stream of pilgrims [...], the Pope, having recognized the tall vicar of Nîmes by his tall stature, exclaimed: "Here is d'Alzon, it's our friend!" and that, breaking through the crowded ranks of the crowd, he had given him his hand to kiss in front of everyone. More than ever, after such a scene, Mgr Besson was determined not to part with him." (17)

Pius IX died a year later. With him disappears the main obstacle to the resignation of Father d'Alzon. When Leo XIII succeeded him, the Founder spent two months in Rome to pay him the

homage of the diocese. On April 13, 1878, he spoke to the new pope about his projects and received permission to withdraw when he deemed it appropriate.

On June 27, 1878, during the laying of the first stone of the Oblate chapel in Nîmes, D'Alzon again presented his resignation. Rejected again, he wrote to Mgr Besson on August 11: *"I do not intend to hasten anything, so as not to leave you in embarrassment. Take until October 1st to replace me... I asked you to be vicar general for three months, and for three years I have kept a place that should no longer be mine... My personal dedication will remain the same. If I no longer serve the Bishop of Nîmes, I will retain my affection for the man I have loved for so long."*

Mgr Besson cannot bring himself to the idea of seeing him leave, because he is convinced that the graces he received are linked to the presence of Father d'Alzon at his side. The latter finally won his case in October 1878. He learned in Lavagnac that he was appointed *"honorary vicar general, retaining the powers he already had over religious communities"* (18).

The people of Nîmes attributed the departure of Father d'Alzon to his discontent after the bishop's decision to undertake major renovation work at the cathedral, or to his annoyance at the sometimes neglected or very un-episcopal tone of certain conversations. In reality, D'Alzon left to devote himself exclusively to his Assumptionist work and to die without ecclesiastical honors. The launch of La Croix, the risk of annexation of the congregation by the Hermits of Saint-Augustin, the laws threatening to expel the congregations from France... all this demanded the



Mgr François-Nicolas Besson, Bishop of Nîmes from 1875 to 1888
Bust in Saint Jean Cathedral, Nîmes

little energy he had left. He understood that these would be the last battles of his life and he intended to fight them to the end.

By way of conclusion, let Mgr Besson remind us of his love of the Church:

"More French than anyone in character, Father d'Alzon was more than anyone Roman in spirit and heart. It was not a religion of fantasy and self-love, but a deep cult, a truly filial tenderness.

If there are men who hesitate to hear the voice of Rome when Rome contradicts their personal views and elevates the interests of the Church above their narrow and stubborn politics, it was the merit of Father d'Alzon for to see only the Church, to serve only the Church, to stand with the Church in these serene heights from which she sees everything change without changing herself, everything passes without passing herself." (19)

Fr. Vincent LECLERCQ
General Postulator

Pope Francis to the pilgrims of the National: “May Our Lady strengthen our faith! »

The National Pilgrimage to Lourdes, animated by the Assumption family, celebrated its 150th anniversary this year and received a message from the Pope on this occasion. Excerpts

I cordially greet you, dear pilgrims from all corners of France, but also friends from abroad, gathered in Lourdes on this 150th anniversary of the National Pilgrimage of the Assumption. I join in the fervent prayer of supplication and gratitude that you address to our beloved Mother, particularly on this feast of August 15. (...) I am therefore happy that, faithful to this long tradition of worship and devotion, there are many of you, here and everywhere in the cathedrals and parishes of France, to raise your prayer to Our Lady, in the greatest filial confidence, a confidence that does not disappoint. (...)

More than ever, the world, and in particular France which was solemnly dedicated to her – a consecration which cannot be abolished – needs Mary’s protection in the face of the difficulties, concerns and challenges of the present time. Let us therefore turn resolutely towards her, since she is our Mother and we are her children!

May the Queen of Peace intervene with her Son so that this much desirable peace is established wherever the sound of weapons is heard. May it arouse in the hearts of each person authentic feelings of fraternal love so that societies grow harmoniously with respect for others, the safeguarding of their dignity and their rights, and so that no one is left behind. May the Mother of



Jesus protect families in a particular way: parents who carry the daily weight of a heavy responsibility; young people so rich in potential, but often worried about their future, or unfortunately already hampered by a number of servitudes; the elderly, rich in their experiences and their wisdom, but too often neglected and abandoned.

May it comfort people who are sick, alone, marginalized, exiled or refugees, all those who suffer... (...)

Dear pilgrims, on this day when we contemplate her with her body and soul in the glory of Heaven, may Our Lady strengthen our faith in the eternal life promised to us, revive our desire for it, and, to obtain it, operate our conversion and renew our commitment as disciples-missionaries of Christ to our brothers and sisters. He alone is the Rock, where our unshakeable hope is fixed and on which we must build our lives and our societies. It is with these feelings, and with great joy, that I give to each of you, to all the people who on this day honor the Virgin of the Assumption, and to all the faithful of France and their pastors, my blessing.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, August 7, 2023.
FRANCIS

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Our Deceased Brothers



† Br. Paul DUCARME, of the Province of Europe, died on July 26, 2023 in Ciney (Belgium). His funeral was celebrated on July 31, in the chapel of the Seniorie d'Omalius. He was 89.

† Fr. Alexis ROC'H, of the Province of Europe, died on August 11, 2023, in Layrac (France). His funeral was celebrated on August 16 in the chapel of Prieuré. He was 97.

† Fr. Maurice LAURENT, of the Province of Europe, died on August 15, 2023, in Aubenas (France). His funeral was celebrated on August 22, in the chapel of l'EHPAD Saint Joseph d'Aubenas, followed by internment in the cemetery of Saint-Baudile of Nîmes. He was 80.

† Fr. Luis Marion DEL CANTO BACHMANN, of the Andean Province, died on August 23, 2023, in Santiago (Chile). His funeral was celebrated on August 24 in the Basilica N.S. of Lourdes at Santiago. His internment followed in the crypt of the Basilica. He was 93.

† Br. Andrew MUZINDA, of the community of Saint-Monica of Nairobi (Vice-Province of East Africa), died on August 31, 2023, in Nairobi (Kenya). His funeral was celebrated on September 6 in the Church of Saint-Monica of Njiru, followed by internment in the Msongari Cemetery in Nairobi. He was 30.