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General Assembly in Genk

GENK, Belgium - On a special day, 2nd February, the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Montfortians of Belgium had a general assembly. In the agenda there's only one item: which project will the Belgian delegation support for the future? It was almost a symbolic day: after the gloomy winter, new light gave us hope. Fr. Marco Pasinato mentioned a 'new birth' in his letter to the delegation superior, Fr. Jos Van den Bergh after the gathering of the 3 councils (Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands) in Vroenhof on 11th December 2017. Fr. Marco and the general bursar Fr. Jim Brady were also present then.

After a warm welcome, Fr. Jos Van den Bergh directly started by reading parts of Fr. Marco's letter. It's not only about 'a new birth' but the entities were also invited to present one project which was supported by all the confreres of the entity. The seed communities were also mentioned, a project of the general council that was cancelled due to lack of means and the right people to support the project. But young confreres from the South can still be sent to the North to work as true missionaries and support the project. These confreres will be full members of the receiving entity.

The project that the council suggests and which is completely in line with the Montfortian charisma, is the Marian apostolate. The non-profit organisation Marian Works already exists for many years and has a long history but one is convinced that even today and tomorrow there is a great need of an apostolate with and inspired by Mary. A short summary of the origin and growth of Marian Works, gives a good picture of the actual situation.

Fr. Frans Fabry explained: the history of Marian Works is closely connected with the *True Devotion* written by Montfort. After 127 years the book appeared again. Through the priest who found the manuscript it came into the hands of a French bishop who had it printed and spread all over the

country. Ever since it was immensely successful especially in religious circles and seminars. Also in Belgium it was translated into Dutch, printed and spread all over the country. Thanks to priest Poppe and cardinal Mercier it became very popular. In 1920 the Dutch Montfortians started a new magazine to support and spread the ideas of Montfort: 'The Standard of Mary'. On request of cardinal Mercier the Montfortians give retreats in all Belgium and on demand of the people the first Montfortian pilgrimage to Lourdes was organised. In 1935 the magazine *Mary, Mediator and Queen (MEK)* appeared and a year later the French edition was published (*MER*). The number of subscribers rose from year to year. At this moment the highlight is over but still there is hope for the future: 2 new collaborators have been contracted which will see to it that the number of subscribers will rise again and that as for the content things will be adjusted to modern times. Still the magazine is and will remain Marian and Montfortian. Also new initiatives have been taken especially in the French speaking part of the country.

After this introduction the confreres were invited to react which some of them eagerly accepted. Of course lots of questions remained unanswered but the project still stands, even stronger so: most of the confreres approve of the project.

In the remaining half of an hour some practical issues were communicated: Piet Goltstein on his own request is no longer delegation bursar. Fr. Jos read his curriculum vitae and sincerely thanks him for all his achievements. The confreres who celebrate their jubilee this year were mentioned and the booklet '*The Montfortian Heritage in Europe*' was distributed. A prayer and a song close this meeting.

After a refreshing drink, a delicious meal followed. At 3 pm everyone returned home after a day of information, communication and most of all a pleasant and interesting meeting.

- Magda Van Goidsenhoven