

International Gathering of Montfortian Associates (IGMA) Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre, August 6-13, 2023

Update of the article published by Brother Daniel in the Newsletter "Echanges et Informations SMM France", no. 222, July 2023.



SAINT LAURENT-SUR-SÈVRE, France - It all started with the meeting of the three General Councils of the three Montfortian Congregations which took place on March 24, 2022 at the Generalate of the Brothers of Saint Gabriel in Rome. It was then agreed that to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the birth of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, which falls on January 31, 2023, we would hold an international gathering of the Associates or missionary partners of our congregations. It was also agreed that Sr. Pierrette BWAMBA, Fr. Arnold SUHARDI and Bro. Dionigi TAFFARELLO would meet on April 29, 2022 to make this idea a reality.

During this meeting, the three representatives of the three General Councils better formulated the objectives of the meeting. Then, they also identified the potential participants (recipients) in this formation, the place and the date of the meeting, and the languages to be used during the meeting. The three representatives of the 3 general councils met again on July 13, 2022. It was then agreed that a team in France should be set up who will be in charge of organizing this gathering, which should bring together around 150 people.

The journey leading to the formation of the local team began on August 16, 2022. There were 9 people present at the meeting that was held at the international community of the Brothers of St. Gabriel in Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre. At that time, Brother Dionigi had the opportunity to share with them the idea of this gathering. The participants responded very positively as they all agreed that this event had to happen. The discussion also led to the content of this international training. We finally decided to form a local team with more members.

During this period, Sr. Pierrette, Brother Dionigi and Fr. Arnold continued to work on the drafting of a letter which will be signed by the 3 superiors general to announce this gathering to all the members of our family. The letter signed on October 15, 2022 by the superiors general was addressed to the members of the Montfortian family to explain the context, the purpose, the date and the place of the implementation of "an international gathering of associates, collaborators, friends laity of our three Congregations".

Furthermore, on October 21, 2022, Sr. Pierrette Bwamba, Fr. Arnold Suhardi and Bro. Dionigi Taffarello sent another letter inviting the potential members of the organizing team of this

encounter in Saint Laurent to hold a meeting on October 24, in order to better understand the content of the letter from the three generals. The letter from the three general assistants also explained what the tasks of the organizing committee to be set up would be.

At the meeting on October 24, 2022, we managed to have a committee coordinator, in the person of Mr. Eric JOYEAU, a teacher at St. Gabriel high school in St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre. The envoys of the SMM to become members of this committee were Fr. Eric MANIRAKIZA, Marie-Line and Deacon Claude TIGNON. In this meeting, a calendar of committee meetings was also established, and an agreement was reached on the distribution of tasks between committee members. Other themes that became the task of this committee were also worked out.

The first joint meeting between the representatives of the three General Councils and the Executive Committee was held on December 17, 2022. Many other people who were present that day volunteered for this meeting. It showed that there is enthusiasm in our extended family to make this event happen. During this meeting, a provisional budget per participant was agreed. A presentation brochure for the program had already been drawn up. A few days after this meeting, the committee succeeded in validating the registration form and the transport estimates.

On March 4, 2023, the second joint meeting took place. On this occasion, each “pole” of the Committee reported on its activities. On June 3, the same meeting was renewed and another was scheduled for July 8. This was the last coordination meeting for the setting up of this gathering which henceforth carried the theme: “Missionary disciples in the Montfortian family”.

Now, let's stop at what concerns the Congregation of the Company of Mary (in Latin “Societas Mariae Montfortana”, abbreviated SMM). On December 1, 2022, Fr. Luizinho sent a letter addressed to: Provincials, Vice-Provincials, Superiors of the Delegations of the Montfort Missionaries or SMM, National or Regional Director of the Association of Mary Queen of All Hearts (AMQAH). The objective was to announce the existence of this initiative, the policy of the SMM concerning the expenses of the meeting and the last date of registration. The result is encouraging as we received many potential participants who signed up. So far, we have 87 registered participants.

For your information, we indicate below the countries of origin of our participants: 3 from Malawi, 2 from Kenya, 4 from Burundi, 2 from Madagascar, 2 from Rwanda, 1 from Argentina, 5 from Brazil, 2 from Colombia, 3 from USA, 2 from Mexico, 4 from Peru, 2 from Indonesia, 11 from Philippines, 1 from Germany, 1 from Belgium, 1 from Croatia, 2 from Poland, 1 from Netherlands, 1 from Denmark, 25 from France, 6 from England, 2 from Italy, 1 from Portugal, 3 from the General Administration.

Some of our participants, especially those arriving before August 6 and leaving after August 13, will stay at the Saint-Esprit, Foyer Mathurin and Foyer Gabriel Deshayes. But during the days of the meeting proper, all these participants will stay at the site of the meeting, which is in Saint Gabriel, with the other participants of the Daughters of Wisdom and the Brothers of Saint Gabriel.

Currently, participants from Madagascar have not received yet their visas. All invitation letters were provided by Fr. Paulin, Provincial of France and the Mayor of Saint Laurent-sur-Sèvre

through the committee of this meeting and Fr. Bala, Procurator General in Rome. Thank you all.

The days of the meeting will be filled with testimonies on the living of Montfortian spirituality for today and with various celebrations of the word and of the Eucharist. There will be conferences on the meaning of baptism, Montfort's relationship to Scripture, synodality in the mission. There will be visits to Montfort-sur-Meu, Pontchâteau and Poitiers. All these activities were reported to Msgr. Pierre D'ORNELLAS, Archbishop of Rennes, Dol and Saint-Malo; to Msgr. Laurent PERCEROU, Bishop of Nantes; to Msgr Pascal WINTZER, Archbishop of Poitiers and of course to Msgr. François JACOLIN, bishop of Luçon. All of them support this event also with their prayers. The closing Mass will be celebrated at the Basilica of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort on Saturday, August 12 at 5:30 p.m., by the Bishop of Luçon, Mgr. Francois JACOLIN.

We are grateful to our Associates for the enthusiasm as reflected in their responses. We receive this as an expression of the synodal spirit that we live with them in our common mission: to establish the Reign of Jesus through Mary in the Holy Spirit. We certainly hope that this gathering will become a means of forming a common vision for even stronger cooperation in the future. We hope for this vision of course, not only in our relationship with them but also in our relationship with our charismatic Montfortian family.

Fr. Arnold SUHARDI, SMM