



A Young Montfortian Priest from Indonesia to Portugal

LISBON, Portugal - *Father Saferinus NJO, SMM is the first Indonesian confrere sent on mission to the Montfortian Delegation in Portugal. In this interview, he gives an initial assessment of his experience.*

Father Saferinus, after a year of your arrival in Portugal, how is your integration into the Portuguese Delegation going?

Dear colleagues, first of all, I wish you all a happy Easter. May the light, love and joy of the risen Christ illuminate our steps and our apostolic work. I have been in Portugal for a year and four months. I arrived here on January 14, 2022. I began a period of learning the language and adapting to the Montfortian community in Fátima. I recognize that this mission is a precious opportunity that God has given and entrusted to me. It is always a grace and an honor for me to be able to accept a mission and to collaborate in it with my confreres. This mission requires me to experience life and work with responsibility in order to learn, grow and flourish. The mission challenges me to always be available and with a spirit of humility to learn a lot and also to welcome God's grace and plan into my life.

This missionary experience is an opportunity and a field of ongoing formation which requires an active, concrete and responsible response from me. Thanks be to God, I have already experienced many great and beautiful things in this mission. I grew and evolved as a person, as a religious and as a priest. I recognize that what is asked of me is above all humility and openness to divine Providence. The mission obliges me to be always available to let myself be molded and grow in ongoing formation. It depends, however, on my responsible answer to my

"yes", repeated every day. In one of his letters, the former general, Father William CONSIDINE, wrote: "To follow Christ is above all to want to be Christ, to allow oneself to be shaped in his likeness. This is the goal of all religious life".

From the beginning of their formation, Montfortian religious and priests must be formed like "white clouds" wandering freely in the heavens, flying wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit leads them [PE 9]. The mission is the vital element of the Montfortian vocation, which is why Montfort wanted us to be "missionaries" (Const. 8). The missionary spirit of Montfort is what should inspire the religious founded by him, and always, like clouds, ready to overcome frontiers and barriers. They will be scattered, working in various parts of the world. The history of their itinerancy and the places where the missions were founded confirm the truth that the children of Montfort are pilgrims without borders and without fear. They are always on the move, allowing themselves to be guided by the will of the Holy Spirit, becoming "liberos" to fulfill the dream of the Holy Spirit. This story and this awareness help me to give my answer with my conscious and enlightened "yes" to serve the mission well. Each mission requires great responsibility. This requires courage, humility and availability. Of course, at the beginning, there were many doubts and fears that assailed me. It was normal for this to be so. But having gone on a mission, I consider it a great gift from God for my life, which I want to take full advantage of. This is not a personal initiative. It was not me who decided. Therefore, I also believe that God will help me on this path and in this mission. Any missionary will never fail if he entrusts himself to divine Providence, to the breath and to the will of the Holy Spirit. It is this confidence that inspired our founder. He lived in this spirit all his life. Montfort invites us to live in the same spirit, recalling here his advice: "If we do not risk something for God, we will not do great things for him either. (Letter 27). So, for me too, the risk I have to take is to have the courage to step out of my comfort zone to embrace the plan that God has for me, in this mission where I now find myself.

Ratio II emphasizes that "a vocation is always born of a loving encounter with Jesus and with the people of God. Therefore, Montfortian religious and priests will always be in the company of Jesus and his people. Being on a mission is that. Montfortian religious and priests are challenged to be open to learning a lot to better serve the mission. The mission is an opportunity to learn new dynamics, new languages and different cultures. Of course, it is difficult. But I believe that God gives me enough strength and capacity to overcome the challenges and difficulties that arise. Every Montfortian community, wherever it is, will always be my home and my community, and the confreres I meet are my brothers. From the first day I arrived here, I never felt alone. I have always felt at home. Thanks be to God, the confreres and the many people I have met have always welcomed my presence in a family and fraternal environment. They help me with many things in this learning period. From them, I receive all the support and brotherly love. I always feel at home with the same love and brotherly warmth. It was the same when I was with the family, and the same when I was in community with my colleagues in Indonesia. The enthusiasm and the ardent desire that I must live and work with my colleagues in Portugal, I believe that they also nourish this same desire. Indeed, from the beginning of my communication with Fr. Amílcar, superior in Portugal, I felt great sympathy and a desire to collaborate with the confreres in Portugal. All this was very important and useful for me during this period and at the beginning of my integration.

What are the positive discoveries and the joys of this first year?

During the first nine months, I was in the community of Fatima to learn the language and the culture, to get to know myself and integrate myself into the dynamics of community life and

the work of the Montfortian priests in their parishes. Thank you for being well accepted and fully supported in every way. I can say that the first months of my stay in this community in Fátima have been a good time of learning and adaptation. A graceful opportunity that allowed me to live in a new place and begin a period of adaptation to a completely new and different language and culture. Of course, it was not an easy task. But in this process, I didn't feel like I was fighting alone. The presence and the support of the confreres and of the people of God in this process of adaptation helped me to enter and integrate myself, little by little, into the dynamics of the mission. I still receive help and support from confreres every day. It helped and supported me a lot in this adaptation process. I have learned and absorbed many things in the process of meeting with the confreres of the community and with the many people whom I have met daily during my journey. I found many things that helped me grow and develop. The community is a privileged school and a laboratory of humanization, of freedom, of obedience, but also of humility (cf. Ratio I, 194). In the community, I always feel an environment of good acceptance, brotherhood and unity, understanding and collaboration. I learned the requirements that are required in the job and the missions. I tried and learned to live with simplicity and sincerity, with tenderness and loyalty, and with transparency in the way of life of the confreres.

From the start, my colleagues tried to help me integrate well into the dynamics of life and work. They forced me not to be afraid to start doing something. It was already very important in this process of my adaptation. I realized that all the moments I have in this adaptation period are tools that help me. These opportunities have become a good learning ground for improvement. The experiences of community life, as well as my contacts with other people in the parish, have become a good school for me to learn on a daily basis. In community, I already lead a few offices and the same outside, in our churches. For example, during the week, in Fátima, I already had services with fixed times to go and celebrate Masses in other communities and retirement homes. Also on Sundays, I accompanied Father Amílcar several times, concelebrating with him in our parishes. It was an opportunity and a grace for me in my inculturation. I also had the joy of rendering some services to the sanctuary of Fátima. It was also an opportunity, full of grace for me, to be able to learn to listen better to people and thus develop my learning of the Portuguese language. This experience in the confessional reinforced, in my conscience, the great nobility of the importance of this sacrament, both for me and for all those for whom I performed this priestly service.

What are the difficulties felt in this integration and how do you deal with them?

The period of adaptation and apprenticeship is a time above all to get to know the field of missionary work, but also to integrate oneself, little by little, into this same work. Of course, this period is naturally the most difficult period. Wanting to do, but still no possibility of acting because of the language. But challenges and difficulties shape and help the missionary to grow and develop. Difficulties and challenges push the missionary to take steps forward, with humility and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. I also realized that the mission continually requires and challenges me to remain humble and open to learning about people's dynamics, environment and culture. Without this humble attitude, it is not possible to live and serve the mission. So, let's say that challenges and difficulties are already part of the mission. The two main obstacles and challenges of any "ad extra" (abroad) mission are language and culture. Montfortian religious and priests also develop their capacities to respond to the challenges of inculturation, by living a deep faith in the new context of action. They will be attentive to ongoing changes and to the study of cultures and languages in the new environments of their mission [Ratio II, 120]. Today, I feel that it was a grace for me to have been sent to work in this mission of the Portuguese Delegation, despite having been forced to learn a new language

and with a completely different culture from my country, Indonesia. I could never have foreseen this when I was in formation, even though I realized and reflected that Montfort missionaries were formed and shaped to be available and open to any type of mission. When I was still in Indonesia, and after being appointed for the mission in Portugal, I received the first knowledge of the Portuguese language from Father Wim PEETERS. He was the first to give me and teach me the basics of the Portuguese language. This initiation, still in Indonesia, helped me a lot in my beginnings in Portugal. However, the adaptation process was happening day by day. I got to know, little by little, the complexity of the Portuguese language. There are many new things to learn, whether words or expressions. But I am convinced that difficulties cannot be an obstacle. Maybe the obstacle is more inside me than outside. The difficulties I encountered also forced me not to stand still. Therefore, with humility and patience, I trust and believe that with time, everything will be better.

In the area of culture, or inculturation, I also found different complexities ranging from food to climate to way of life. But I consider it normal that challenges and difficulties appear when starting a new life and with different people in culture and with their different habits. Gradually, I learned to know and understand. I feel challenged to step out of my comfort zone, to be open and transparent, to experience and learn about new cultures. When I was in formation in my country, I only had the experience of living with people from my culture. But for me, now, I consider it a grace to be able to know, learn and live in a multicultural environment. Therefore, I always try to be open to learning and growing through new experiences, new contacts that increase unity. I try to live every moment with enthusiasm and joy.

You are appointed as a member of the parish community of Lisbon. How would you describe your first official mission in Lisbon?

After nine (9) months of living and providing services in the community of Fátima, behold, on October 2, 2022, I received obedience for the first official mission of the Portuguese Delegation, after having been appointed vicar in the parish of Póvoa de Santo Adrião, in Lisbon. I was grateful for the confidence of the delegation in entrusting me with this mission. It is a precious opportunity to be able to live and exercise my priesthood in the company of other confreres of the community, at the service of the faithful of this parish. This community is small. We are four in the community, namely: Father Carlos FERNANDES, SMM, parish priest, Father Miguel QUISSOLA, SMM, superior and parochial vicar, Father Saferinus, SMM and Mgr. Rui VALÉRIO, SMM, Bishop of the Armed Forces and National Security. For me, it was my first mission as a priest working in a parish. Therefore, I feel happy and excited to be able to work with my confreres and parishioners in our parish of Póvoa de Santo Adrião and Olival Basto. It is an opportunity and a challenge to be able to live in such a small community, but with good dynamics in the parish. I found not only joy and happiness but also new challenges and difficulties and I continue to live here.

This first mission invites me to learn new things. I am with my confreres and parishioners to walk together. I am still young, so I still have a lot of idealism which, as is normal, still needs experiences to mature my ideals and grasp new ways of acting in the apostolate. I see that I still lack a lot of experience working in the parish. This is why my new assignment abroad is a blessing and an opportunity for me to learn, grow and develop. This is a good opportunity for me to learn new ways of working in ministry. Thanks be to God, the confreres with whom I collaborate take me little by little into a real situation of the life and dynamics of the parish. My colleagues gave me a lot of space and opportunities to learn. And I must always be available

and open to learning and collaborating in any way possible. For this reason, I already accompany certain groups in the parish such as altar servers, visitors to the sick and the Legion of Mary. I consider this opportunity to walk with them as a grace. Occasionally, and subject to availability, I also collaborate with the services of the Sanctuary of Fátima.

What would you advise a young colleague, still in training, but who is preparing with the prospect of coming, one day, to work in this country or in any other country in Europe?

Honestly, I dare not give specific recommendations. I believe everyone has their own unique way. Every place is different and with different habits and needs. When I was little, for me the word missionary was closely linked to religious and priests who came from Europe to work in Asia, or rather in Indonesia. They left their country, their homeland, their family to proclaim and spread the gospel throughout the world. They not only succeeded in sowing the Christian faith, but also inspired many religious and priestly vocations in their mission countries. All this are gift and grace of God. And today, there are already many religious and priests from Asia who are sent to those same countries, from which the first evangelizers from Asia came. The word of the gospel bears fruit everywhere. Any missionary activity requires great preparation and responsibility. There are many challenges and difficulties. But, by contemplating the experience of European missionaries, they were able to overcome obstacles, challenges and new difficulties in their missionary work. They were well prepared for the mission entrusted to them. They adapted to the dynamics and experiences of people. Zeal, preparation, openness, and humility were integral to the success of their work. The mission is a learning ground. So, let's say that the mission is a continuing education.

This emphasis is part of the formation and mission of the Montfortians. We are invited to stay open to learn. The formation will never end when the religious and the priest have already made their perpetual vows. From then on, the mission places the religious and the priest in a new process of ongoing formation. Getting to know the dynamics, the environment, the culture and the different things related to the mission, of course it is never easy. There are challenges and difficulties. Every place and every moment have its own difficulties and challenges. What makes the difference is a person's response to various challenges and difficulties. I have always believed that the Montfortian religious and priests were inspired by the zeal of its founder Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, especially in his abandonment to divine Providence. In this example from our Founder, every Montfortian religious and priest is challenged not to be afraid to face new challenges and difficulties. You must always have the courage, the availability and the will to learn and grow in a spirit of mission.

Europe is a continent of great cultural and historical diversity. There are many different things offered both as opportunities and as challenges and difficulties. There is a huge demand for adapting missionaries. But in Europe, there is also great openness, warmth, and fraternity on the part of the confreres and the people of God, in the reception of the missionaries who come here on mission. Something very important for this missionary project is the need for open formation in learning new languages. Learning the language and culture of the country, although not easy, will be fundamental for the fruit of the mission. Of course, this is not an easy thing. It's all about perseverance and humility.

The next World Youth Day will take place in Portugal. What new opportunities may arise for us Montfortians?

As we know, from August 1 to 6 of this year 2023, Portugal will welcome thousands of young people from all over the world during the great appointment of World Youth Day (WYD). It is a meeting and a pilgrimage for young people from all over the world. They all come with a great desire and thirst to rediscover Christ, present in the figure of the Pope, but also in the crowd of young people present here. It is an occasion of grace to be able to meet again in the presence of Pope Francis. It is also a celebration of youth which gives us a positive sign of the values of faith carried by these young people from all continents. Young people represent passion, strength, and confidence. They are an important part of the Church's mission to witness faith, hope, and love in building a better world. WYD should be a celebration of this sharing of Christian faith, hope, and love. Young people from all over the world want to share this joy of living the same faith in Jesus Christ. These World Youth Days proved to be a laboratory of faith, a place of emergence of vocations, both in view of marriage and in view of the consecrated and priestly life. It is an instrument of evangelization and transformation of the Church. It is therefore also a very appropriate and propitious time to enjoy and share the beauty, wisdom, and richness of the vocation to consecrated life. We are all invited to participate and walk, each according to our possibilities, in this pilgrimage. As members already consecrated, our presence, physical or spiritual, is therefore very important to bear witness to all of our joy, which is already the fruit of the beauty, wisdom, and richness of consecrated life.

Also, for our Montfortian family, because some of its members may be present, it is a golden opportunity to share and spread the spirituality of our founder among the young people present. During catechesis meetings or other moments of prayer and reflection, we can offer young people our personal testimony and other resources likely to help them grow in faith and spirituality. It will also be a good opportunity to promote the writings of Montfort. We have stalls that can help with this type of dissemination of books about our spirituality, or through conversations about our vocation. We, Montfortians of Portugal, have the obligation, as far as possible, to encourage, support and facilitate, especially the young people of our parish communities, so that they participate actively in these days. It is important to build this atmosphere, starting from the respective parishes, so that young people can, already during the preparation, enjoy some of the foreseeable fruits of these World Youth Days in this year 2023, in Lisbon. May everything praise the Lord and be a blessing to the whole Church.

Fr. Saferinus NJO, SMM