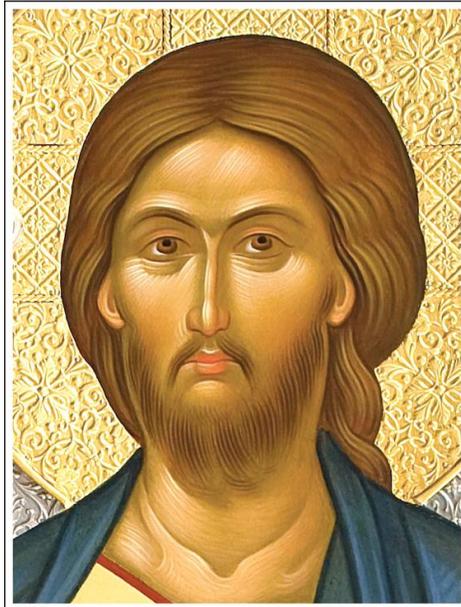


**Montfortians**  
on journey:  
**pilgrims**  
without borders



**Acts**

**General Chapter 2017**

**Missionaries of the Company of Mary**

GENERAL CHAPTER 2017  
ROME, 1-20 MAY 2017

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## Letter of introduction by the Superior General

*“How beautiful, on the mountains,  
the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
the messenger of good news,  
who announces salvation.”*  
(Is 52,7)

Dear confreres,

“Montfortians on the journey: pilgrims without borders!”

This has been the theme of our 37<sup>th</sup> Montfortian General Chapter. It had been started in each of our entities: communities, delegations, vice-provinces and provinces.

We could not have chosen a theme reflecting better the missionary style of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort. It is enough to read some of his Cantiques or the *Prayer for Missionaries* to grasp how Father de Montfort was a man always on the move, a missionary who knew no borders. He was a priest who let himself be driven by the force of the Holy Spirit to evangelize the people.

Allow me to take as an example a bishop who is almost contemporary with us, Helder Camara (1909-1999), bishop of the diocese of Olinda-Recife in Brazil, who lived his Episcopal ministry during the most difficult times of the military dictatorship. He was a man who loved his people, who always walked, while evangelizing the streets of Olinda. Every day he would broadcast a radio program: “A look at the town”. He would speak of what he saw while walking through town. He would speak of the people’s joys, of their daily challenges. Although he walked in the town of Olinda, he would never mention its name in the program. His “look at the town” was directed at any town, at all the towns: places of fear and hope,

of love and solidarity, of egoism and violence. He liked to say that the believer makes the town a dwelling place for all, where each human being must feel at home. The Christian, in his town, builds bridges of peace; he is a builder of love and hope.

One can recognize in that example a living witness of the values of the Gospel.

If we look at Saint Louis Marie de Montfort, Blessed Marie Louise of Jesus and Bishop Helder Camara as witnesses to be followed, it is because they have been recognized as “pilgrims without borders”. Walking the streets of the world, their lives have become meaningful through their words and actions. Full of hope and peace, they carried within themselves the living and transforming word, Jesus-Christ, Incarnate Wisdom.

It is in such a context that I present to you the final document of our Montfortian General Chapter. The General Chapter has been a point of arrival, but it is at the same time a departure point. It was started in our communities. Now we send it back to our communities.

With great competence and affection, Father Jean-Claude Lavigne, O.P., our facilitator throughout the Chapter, accompanied us and helped us embrace in our hearts what we are going to entrust to the whole Congregation.

The atmosphere of fraternity, prayer, study and sharing we experienced during these weeks of the Chapter allowed us to produce this document which aims at being for all an invitation to move from words to action. What we propose here are very important priorities which will guide the work of the new general administration and the life of all Montfortians in the next years. Here are the six challenges which we are called to take in our prayer, and which we want to work on in order to meet them successfully:

1. *The challenge of ongoing conversion.*
2. *The challenge of creating a culture of on-going formation.*
3. *The challenge of initial formation and accompaniment of young confreres in a Montfortian spirit.*
4. *The challenge of evangelisation of today's world "à la Montfort".*
5. *The challenge of the transmission of the Montfortian heritage, spiritual and material.*
6. *The challenge of a style of governance adapted to the realities of the Congregation and the world.*

Starting from these challenges, we are invited to read again the life and writings of our holy Founder in order to initiate concrete actions in our own life and in our mission. Father de Montfort was a man of action. He was a meaningful inspiration for the Church and for the world.

The Montfortian of today is a person who listens to the cry of the poor like God does:

*"I am great, I am God, but I am your Father.  
 You are my elder sons, My true and chosen friends,  
 My dear predestined souls, My dwelling-places fair.  
 All the evil done to you Is done also to me."  
 (Cantique 18, 7-8)*

The Montfortian of today, a "pilgrim without borders", looks with love - as a father and a mother - on children, adolescents and the most vulnerable persons in this world. He will be incapable of hurting them because he will see in each one of them the face of Saints Francesco and Jacinta, the little shepherds recently canonised by Pope Francis in Fatima.

The Montfortian of today, a "pilgrim without borders" is a prophetic sign of fraternity in this world wounded by

inequality and indifference. He feels united, member of a community, capable of moving from words to action.

We feel protected and loved by the Virgin Mary, our Mother, to whom we sang so often during the chapter:

*“You were first on the road;  
Walk with us, Mary,  
on our journey of faith,  
it is a journey towards God.”*

We feel animated and driven to action by our patrons Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort and Blessed Marie-Louise of Jesus. They keep telling us: Courage, dear brothers, the Mission goes on!

Sincerely in Christ and St-Louis-Marie-de-Montfort

Fr. Luiz Augusto Stefani, S.M.M.  
(Fr. Luizinho)  
Superior General

Rome, 20 May 2017

## THE CHALLENGE OF ONGOING CONVERSION

*“Charity urges us on.”* (Hymn 4, 17)

*“Whether you are at the very beginning of the journey  
Or far along on the path,  
The love which has urged you to follow Jesus lives always.  
It is up to you to rediscover it and to maintain it.  
That is the task of your entire life!”*  
(Ratio I, p. 4)

*“Come back, sinner, Jesus is calling you;  
In your wayward life, His voice is heard,  
For He pursues you, never wearying.  
He is a Saviour, a Saviour most tender.  
Poor lost soul, He yearns to embrace you.”*  
(Hymn 98, 9-10)

### **1. Convictions**

1. The passionate love of God for us is the heart and the basis of our religious life. We need to constantly renew our answer to this love.
2. Conversion is a gift to each one. But each one must welcome it in himself.
3. Sharing one's conversion experience allows for enrichment and deepening.
4. Spiritual experience and fraternal life form a single whole that one cannot separate.

## 2. Propositions

1. Each member of the congregation should have the possibility for a time of renewal.
2. Revive the resources of the Montfortian tradition, e.g. the writings and the life of Montfort, the rosary, the Hymns, the Covenant with God, the consecration to Jesus through Mary.
3. Find a way to live our vows in today's world (cf “*Walking together... in the footsteps of the poor apostles*”, *Ratio, volume I*).
4. Use modern means of communication for nourishing the bonds between us.

## 3. Means

1. Plan periods of silence and solitude in our daily schedule
2. Return to our roots which are the writings and the life of Montfort; (*Lineamenta*, p. 6)
3. Set a calendar of community meetings and retreats that includes sharing on our spiritual lifestyle
4. The superior accompanies his confreres on their spiritual journey. He does not judge, but accompanies by listening, by challenging, and if needed by provoking.

*“Come to my help,  
O gentle and divine Mary,  
Come to my help!  
I suffer and groan every day.  
Show compassion on my plight.  
Free me from my troubles, I beg you.  
Come to my help!*

*Are you no longer  
The cure of incurables?  
Are you no longer  
The health of all the disabled?  
The strong refuge of the guilty,  
The sole help of the destitute?  
Are you no longer?”*  
(Hymn 145, 1.5)

## THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING A CULTURE OF ONGOING FORMATION

From the Letter of the Formation Committee, no. 2

*“We see the importance of creating in our entities and in our congregation as a whole an atmosphere and a culture of formation and discernment that will allow confreres at every stage of life to see the need of and have a desire for ongoing formation. Both at the local and at the international level more occasions for ongoing formation should be made available to confreres. This will support us in our daily efforts to be faithful to our identity as Montfortians.”*

### **4. Convictions**

1. The love of Christ and love for the congregation and the needs of the world today impel us to act and to hold ourselves accountable to our ongoing formation.
2. All of us should engage in creating a culture of ongoing formation.
3. To choose ongoing formation is to choose life. Not to choose it is to choose death. The time is NOW. To delay implementing a plan of ongoing formation is another way of refusing to choose ongoing formation.
4. The future of the congregation rests upon this.
5. With ongoing formation, we would be able to move from simply updating to truly re-founding the congregation.
6. Such programs would provide confreres and communities with passion and vision for the future.
7. The responsibility for ongoing formation lies primarily with the individual confrere.

## 5. Propositions

We are invited to promote a style of ongoing formation that:

1. Includes ordinary ongoing formation that takes place in day to day life and periodic ongoing formation (monthly, yearly, sabbaticals, special training).
2. Is consistent in its content and regular.
3. Is based on mutual trust in a fraternal climate.
4. Is holistic, not just an intellectual exercise, taking into account confreres' lived experience and the reality of today's world.
5. Is comprehensive and includes several aspects:
  - Human formation (especially psychosexual growth) at all stages of life including the safeguarding of children and of vulnerable people;
  - Montfortian Formation;
  - Formation in skills for ministry.
6. Operates on the level of the general administration, the entity, the local community and the individual.
7. Ongoing formation concerns also formators, bursars, superiors and other ministries.
8. Ongoing formation should use the principles of adult education.

## 6. Means

1. Allow ourselves to be inspired by reading and reflecting on important sources:
  - *Lectio Divina*;
  - Engage in a personal and/or communal reading from the works of Father de Montfort;

- Engage in a communal re-reading of “*Walking together... in the footsteps of the poor apostles*” (*Ratio, Volume I*);
  - Engage in a reading of documents of the Church (e.g. *Evangelii Gaudium*) and documents of the Congregation to reflect on their rooting in the Montfortian tradition today.
2. Develop strategies and ways of monitoring progress in ongoing formation, by initiating the following:
    - Each confrere will develop a yearly plan for his personal ongoing formation which he discusses with the superior of the entity or his delegate.
    - Each entity will develop a yearly plan for ongoing formation, and will report to the general administration how this has been carried out.
    - Each entity will find ways to foster growth in confreres’ spiritual life (e.g. meeting with a spiritual director) and ministry (ministry mentors or supervisors for young confreres during the first years of ministry, peer supervision for experienced confreres).
  3. Develop an “ongoing formation resource bank,” available on a private SMM website, that would include, among other things, video-conferences of resource persons giving presentations, ideas for organizing days of formation, possible topics, questions for reflection, techniques for encouraging a deeper sharing among confreres, etc.
  4. Develop or strengthen existing means of ongoing formation:

- Resource community in St. Laurent as a place to receive confreres and as a residence for an itinerant team;
  - FIM (*Formation Internationale Montfortaine*);
  - The Montfortian Month;
  - PPP (Preparation for Perpetual Profession) – perhaps adapt this as a renewal model for confreres.
5. Superiors endorse the spontaneous initiatives of ongoing formation begun by confreres.
  6. In order to animate and evaluate the plan for ongoing formation and to help us follow through on our priority, we will initiate:
    - On the level of the generalate, designating a person responsible for ongoing formation. This person could be assisted by an ongoing formation committee.
    - On the level of the entity, designating a person responsible for promoting ongoing formation in the life of the entity. This person could be assisted by an ongoing formation committee. The entities could avail themselves of programs offered by the local Church and Conferences of religious.
    - On the level of the generalate in dialogue with the entities, identifying confreres who have the talent to become formators, leaders, bursars, and other specialists in order to offer them specific formation.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF INITIAL FORMATION AND ACCOMPANIMENT OF YOUNG CONFRERES IN A MONTFORTIAN SPIRIT**

### **7. Convictions**

1. We believe that formation is the work of a team and not of a single man. An isolated formator could be in danger and/or be dangerous.
2. We are convinced of the need for involvement of the whole Entity, and of the importance of witnessing, in the formation process.
3. We insist on the implementation of the Montfortian identity in the process of initial formation and in the day-to-day life of our young confreres involved in missionary activities.
4. We believe in the importance of regular and prepared meetings for the young confreres.

### **8. Propositions**

1. We propose that more resources and more time be given to human formation during the initial formation, especially during the period of temporary vows.
2. We propose that an emphasis be given to Montfortian identity during the period of initial formation.
3. We propose to create and/or consolidate practical ways of accompanying our young confreres during the first years of their ministry.

## **9. Means**

### 1. Initial human formation

- Make sure there is a psychological and psychosexual evaluation of each candidate.
- Provide personal and regular accompaniment at the level of the Scholasticate.
- Take into consideration the personal history and the family context of every Candidate.
- Provide a personalized follow up by professionals to young confreres living difficult situations.
- Provide a specific formation to ensure a secure environment for children and vulnerable persons.

### 2. For young confreres

- Identify and prepare supportive communities to welcome young confreres.
- Appoint, at the level of a community or communities, a reference person for the young confreres.
- Organize regular formation sessions for the team involved in the accompaniment of young confreres (Superior of the welcoming community, Superior of the Entity, and reference person).
- Strengthen and/or organize meetings for young confreres at the level of the Congregation, at the continental level and/or at the local level.

### 3. Emphasis on Montfortian identity

- Dedicate specific time for Montfortian formation other than the periods that are for studies in Philosophy and Theology (e.g. through Montfortian days, homilies and retreats on Montfortian identity).

- Make Montfortian resources available during the period of initial formation (e.g. books, invitations of senior confreres, presence and testimonies of senior confreres in houses of formation, invitations to experts in our spirituality).
  - Promote the missionary dimension during the period of formation.
  - Promote Montfortian experiences (pilgrimages at the important Montfortian sites, Montfortian weekends).
  - Evaluate and update the programs of formation frequently, at the level of all the Entities and, at least every six years, at the level of the Congregation.
4. Make available as soon as possible, *Volume 2 of the Ratio* of our Congregation.

## THE CHALLENGE OF EVANGELISATION OF TODAY'S WORLD «À LA MONTFORT»

### 10. Convictions

1. We are convinced that, as followers of Jesus, «the Lord has sent [us] to bring Good News to the poor» (the peripheries) (*Luke 4:18, RM 2*).
2. Father de Montfort pushes us to be daring and creative on our missionary journey.
3. We are challenged by the thirst for transcendence and spirituality in today's world.
4. Our prayer and enthusiasm enable us to «touch hearts».

### 11. Proposition

1. A plan  
To bring the Gospel in today's world “à la Montfort”, we propose that:
  - Each entity will set up a plan for popular itinerant mission -even though it be occasional- that actualizes our call to be Montfortians on the road.
2. The characteristics of this plan  
This missionary plan implies:
  - confreres, lay persons, the local Church and if necessary other entities (working together);
  - sharing the life of people, with a special attention to all forms of poverty;
  - capacity of adapting to local realities, daring to go off the beaten tracks;

- attention to the elements of the Montfortian spirituality towards “renewing the spirit of Christianity” (*RM 56*).

## **12. Means**

1. This plan should be realized with existing human resources.
2. It should be formulated in a detailed manner.
3. It is evaluated regularly at meetings of the entity.
4. Make use of new means of social communication (social media).
5. Find ways to perpetuate the fruits of the mission (e.g.: rosary groups, helping the poor, catechesis to youth).

## **THE CHALLENGE OF THE TRANSMISSION OF THE MONTFORTIAN HERITAGE (SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL)**

### **13. Convictions concerning our spiritual heritage**

1. Daring to journey as Father de Montfort did!
2. The need to breathe new life in the understanding of the writings and life of Father de Montfort.
3. The importance of international communities for spreading the Montfortian spirituality.
4. Valuing the new means of social communication.
5. The need for communities to be places of welcome where hope, peace and joy are nurtured.
6. The need to live and to foster Marian devotion in a new language.
7. The Montfortian sites have value for our spirituality.
8. The life and the works of confreres have great value, particularly the life and the experience of senior confreres.

### **14. Propositions**

1. Prepare resource persons in the field of spirituality.
2. Establish Seed-Communities with motivated confreres for the spreading of the spirituality and the formation of lay people.
3. Involve confreres in spreading our spirituality through the Web, magazines, texts (e.g. *Totus tuus journey*); put video-conferences of confreres on line.
4. Help persons and communities to be welcoming and challenging
  - through a particular attention to persons consecrated to Jesus through Mary and to the Association of “Mary, Queen of All Hearts”;
  - through projects of charity and solidarity.

5. Form ourselves, first of all, to the devotion to Mary so “that our devotion proceeds from real faith, and leads us to a filial love for our Mother and to imitate her virtues”. (*LG 67*)
6. Form leaders, through sound theology, an ecclesiology of communion and through a faithful and reflective reading of Scripture and the works of Father de Montfort.
7. Promote pilgrimages, formation programs, and courses at Montfortian sites.
8. Value the life and experience of senior confreres and publish their memoirs (e.g. thumbnail sketches, Facebook).

### **15. Convictions concerning the heritage of our temporal goods and fixed assets**

1. « Our temporal goods are at the service of the mission ».
2. The vow of poverty involves dealing with the management of our temporal goods.
3. The need to begin training competent confreres for financial administration for now and for the future.
4. The complexity of the world and the vast range of problems have great impact in the field of finances, justice...
5. Solidarity among confreres is essential.
6. The administration of money is a means towards the mission.
7. Formation, at all levels, contributes to the human patrimony of the Congregation.
8. The funds and places of retirement for sick and aged confreres should always be made available.
9. Our temporal goods are the heritage of the whole Congregation.

## **16. Propositions**

1. Form candidates to fully live the vow of poverty, beginning with Postulancy.
2. Form confreres for administration in the fields of finance, juridical and administrative skills.
3. Having, in each Entity, lay people to help us in administration and in resolving legal problems.
4. Consider the *per capita* as a participation in solidarity of all the confreres.
5. Prepare a financial plan for formation at all levels to be reappraised regularly.
6. Prepare, in each Entity, a plan for the care of the aged or sick confreres.
7. Establish criteria for the use, sale or purchase of lands, properties and the management of our investment portfolios. Our investments will be adjusted to our financial capacities.
8. Building up strategies towards self-sufficiency requires information and the participation of the Generalate.
9. Care of the environment and integral ecology has to be included in our decision processes.
10. Sale of the Congregation's temporal goods must respect the spirit of poverty and be used to help for formation and mission.
11. Each entity needs to make an inventory, and an evaluation of lands, buildings, and their use.
12. Father de Montfort's sites are a heritage for all, and have to be looked after by all.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF A STYLE OF GOVERNANCE ADAPTED TO THE REALITIES OF THE CONGREGATION AND THE WORLD**

*“We want to become a real family, where each member feels welcomed and appreciated. Enriched by our differences, we want to live a life that is caring, full of good will, respect, and patience.”* (RM 44) (Lineamenta p.5).

*“We feel the call to become Church-Koinonia: communion in the spirit, in a momentum of affection and compassion.”* (Phil. 2. 1) (Lineamenta p.3).

### **17. Convictions**

1. Governance is not simply a way of managing, but a way of being present, of entering into relationships. A leader must be a contact person, actively involved in the life around him, loving humanity.
2. The leader must practice trust and be perceived as a man of trust: trust in God, trust in himself – in his skills and in his limitations – trust regarding the abilities of his confreres and of other persons, trust also in his dealings with institutes and organizations with which he works.
3. Every person is more than his limitations: no one person is perfect. This attitude provides the possibility of being better able to manage relations with someone who is in error, or who has committed some fault, and go further together.
4. In governing one must always try to exercise a balance between openness towards confreres and confidentiality.

5. We must always aim at “shared” responsibility. Such an attitude will respond to a need, to a request, to the life around us. No one should play at being a “lone ranger”. Sharing responsibility must begin to be learned even from the earliest days of formation. Thus, will we avoid that passivity that leaves everything to the leader. This will enable us to become truly, “*liberos*” and adult in our relationships.
6. A leader is always a “member of”, and he will remain a member of the group. A leader needs to be a team player and work with teams that share a part of his responsibilities (principle of subsidiarity). He must be aware of the need to be accompanied and meets that need.
7. A leader is not someone who knows everything, who perceives everything, who intuits everything. He is first and foremost someone who knows himself well, both his strengths and limitations. He is committed to his service, like all human beings, with his limits and his abilities, and he knows how to seek help.
8. “Doing together” invites us to say “we” and not “I” and “you”.
9. A leader is one who follows Christ, seeking to imitate his gentleness, his gaze, his words and his deeds.

## **18. Propositions**

1. To develop trust and relationships
  - Perceive and promote skills of leadership even from the beginning of formation.
  - Forming to responsibility must be organized and fostered at all levels by the congregation (general, regional, local entity)
    - Formation of potential leaders;
    - Ongoing formation of superiors.
  - Foster a useful and effective presence of the Generalate close to the entities and the confreres,

by making more use of modern means of communication that offer greater possibilities of deepening and nourishing our relationships, accepting our responsibilities, and listening more to one another more. It is necessary, however, to remember that such means of communication never replaces physical presence.

2. To develop accountability
  - Do not hesitate to have recourse to more qualified non-Montfortian collaborators and competent experts.
  - Make regular evaluations of everything that we undertake together, and at all levels.
  - In the perspective of a shared governance, existing commissions could become more and more important in sharing responsibilities; each level plays its part.
  - Existing commissions and others to be created will be of help to the leader at the “general” level – as in a circular network – in making their discernments.
  - “Fund raising” for the development of young entities and their respective projects will be of particular concern. Nevertheless, it remains to each entity to strive to develop as much financial self-sufficiency as possible.
3. Efforts will be made to continue to foster attention and sensitivity to problems that exist in the Company, to establish an open dialogue (e.g. alcoholism, inappropriate relationships, abuse of vulnerable persons)
4. To continue with the implementation of our congregation's program “*Protecting the Vulnerable*”.

## **POINTS OF ALERT**

### **submitted by the capitulants to the General Administration**

#### **1. COMMUNICATION**

In today's world, being proactive in that sector allows us to better know each other and to make known our mission and spirituality.

#### **2. ELDER CONFRERES**

Bridging different generations is a challenge in our world. We must innovate in that matter and foster for all confreres, whatever their age, participation in the life of the Congregation.

#### **3. INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**

Responding to the encyclical *Laudato Si*, the Montfortians will motivate themselves and be more responsible.

#### **4. INTERNATIONAL FORMATION**

It is essential to our mission, a richness for our Congregation, an environment needed for the preparation of our future leaders. It must be constantly assessed and adapted.

#### **5. LAY PERSONS**

As a Montfortian family – missionaries, consecrated persons, lay associates – we can realize apostolic projects à la Montfort. Cooperation must be promoted.

#### **6. BEING PROACTIVE IN THE TRANSMISSION OF OUR MONTFORTIAN HERITAGE**

The wide variety of groups inspired by the spirituality of Father de Montfort is both an opportunity and a challenge. Discernment and formation are strongly needed.

## Letter of the Capitulants to the Confreres

Rome, 20 May 2017

Dear Confrere,

The face of Father de Montfort has changed! It is no longer that of a 43-year-old Breton missionary. The living face of Saint Louis Marie shows strong hints of Europe, with lovely accents from the Caribbean, from Latin America, from Africa and Asia. The living face of Montfort at times appears young and bursting with new energy; at times it breathes forth experience and wisdom and age. The living face of Montfort knows no borders; it is not contained in the North or the South. The living face of Saint Louis Marie is *yours* – and that of *all* your Montfortian confreres around the world!

This 37<sup>th</sup> General Chapter that we have celebrated in Rome strikingly, joyfully bathed us in the reality that **together** – with our brothers and sisters in the Montfortian Family – we give hand and heart and voice to the tenderness of God toward each of his children. With Mary of Nazareth we rejoice in the Mighty One who lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. Our words and especially our actions prepare the way for the Spirit of God to renew this cherished earth and all her peoples.

When you receive the complete Acts of the Chapter, you will see that we have tried our best to incarnate our deep convictions into propositions and strategies that will touch the needs and challenges of today and help to move us onward toward tomorrow. One challenge that transverses and intersects all others is the call to ongoing conversion, to grow in every age in life and light and love.

Young or not so young, Saint Paul's own missionary experience stretches us to enter the mystery of dying and rising to new life. *"We are treated as unrecognized, and yet acknowledged; as dying, and behold we live; as chastised, and yet not put to death; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing all things..."* (2 Cor 6: 8-10).

The living face of Saint Louis Marie still needs YOU – your smile, your tears, your eyes, your mouth. Join us, join all your sisters and brothers in carrying on the mission, in proclaiming the Good News! May Mary help you to be more faithful to Jesus Wisdom than you have ever been before. May the daily renewal of the Consecration deepen your share in Father de Montfort's own charism.

*"Virgin, most faithful,  
make me in everything so committed a disciple,  
imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom,  
that I may become, through your intercession and example,  
fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth,  
and with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen!"*

( LEW 227 )

With great affection and joy,

*Your Brothers assembled in General Chapter*

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**Montfortians**  
on journey:  
**pilgrims**  
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