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**Letter of the Superior General to the Montfortian Family
on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort**

The celebration of the feast of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, in this year 2020, is particular indeed.

When on Friday, 31 January 2020, the anniversary of Louis Grignion's birthday, we launched in the General House chapel the Continental Year of Europe, under the sign of hope "Montfort EurHope", with the presence of a delegation of Brothers from Europe and of the Superiors of the entities of this continent, I had not foreseen that the feast of his birth into heaven would be celebrated in this complete confinement brought about by the COVID-19. When, at the end of that beautiful, simple and prayerful liturgy, I personally handed over to each of the Superiors the leaflet of the calendar for the Continental Year, with all the activities planned, I never imagined the impediments of the corona pandemic.

This coronavirus contagion has upturned all the planning, has changed the life of millions of people, and has placed the human family harshly to the test. This tiny virus which has brought about an unheard of health crisis, which has provoked an unforeseen situation marked by fear, anxiety, anguish, suffering, and despair and caused so many deaths, reminds us of our limits and our fragility.

Pope Francis, looking at this "contagion of coronavirus" in this Easter message, Sunday 12 April 2020, expressed for the world in this time of pandemic, the wish for another contagion, that he calls the "*contagion of hope*" which is passed from heart to heart.

On the occasion of the Feast of our Founder this year, in the heart of the continental year of Europe, it is the Holy Father's message of hope that I would like to relay to the whole Congregation and to the entire Montfortian Family.

In this time of great suffering, before this world caught unprepared, faced with this unexpected happening, men and women, more than ever, have need of a word of hope which consoles and acts of mercy which lift them up.

We disciples of Montfort, in this time of lost points of reference, we must read again and strike up – for the men and women to whom we are near on mission – *Hymn 7* of our Founder, "Solidity of Hope", where Montfort sings of hope as "that anchor firm and stable; that unshakeable pillar", and invites us "to base your hope on God alone who holds you in his hand."

Into the heart of this context of fear, uncertainty, exasperation and despair, I would like to invite you to inspire hope. I am not speaking of a blissful optimism or a guileless naiveté, but rather, as Pope Francis says, a new, living hope that comes from God.

Into the heart of this situation of solitude, grief and great difficulties brought about by the pandemic, we must proclaim hope and give witness by a missionary presence characterized among us by creativity, proximity, co-responsibility, and solidarity.

Today, more than yesterday, is the time for **creativity**. With measures of confinement, of social distancing leading to the suspension of public celebrations of masses and pastoral activities, we must use the “*creative imagination*” of Father de Montfort, in order to find innovative ways to animate our communities and new strategies of evangelization to accompany the people. I take this occasion to congratulate the confreres, who through various means of communication (Facebook, YouTube, etc.), every day provide for the participation of the faithful in Eucharistic celebrations and other spiritual exercises. For many among us, it is a new and wonderful learning experience.

Today is also, more than before, the time for **proximity**. We are invited to strengthen the proximity, the nearness, among us members of the Montfortian Family. I take this opportunity to offer my deep sympathies to the Montfortian confreres who have lost members of their families, to the Daughters of Wisdom who, due to this virus, have seen the passing of some twelve of their sisters, to the Brothers of Saint-Gabriel who have seen two of their confreres pass. We are also challenged to renew our nearness to the most poor, the most vulnerable. We must stay attuned to this present moment and ask ourselves, with a creative fidelity, how would Montfort respond to the challenges that confront us today in the four corners of the Congregation?

It is also the time for **co-responsibility**. We are called to collaborate with God, to collaborate among ourselves and with others in order to envisage innovative, effective and adequate responses to this health crisis which has triggered an economic crisis, so as to make our Congregation more present to the weakest of persons.

It is equally a time for **solidarity**. Besides the negative effects of the coronavirus, solidarity is one of the greatest positive effects of this deadly virus. How many people: doctors, nurses, first responders, volunteers, priests, religious and so many others who have given proof of solidarity, who have understood, as Pope Francis says, “that no one saves himself alone.” We must mutually support one another, to find innovative ways of fraternity in order to continue to come to the help of populations suffering terribly because of this COVID-19 pandemic, to put in place supporting actions that render God’s concern alive and help the poorest of the poor.

In this time of great challenges, let us move ahead together, my Brothers! Let us fasten ourselves to Mary, “the anchor of hope” (TD 175)! Let us rekindle the flame of hope in our communities and in our places of mission. Let us be pilgrims who console, encourage and announce hope.

I wish all of you a happy feast of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort; and –in a manner still more creative– the mission continues.

United in prayer,

Fr. Luiz Augusto STEFANI, SMM
Superior General