



The Visit of Fr. Marco and the Assembly in Belgian Delegation

BELGIUM - The bond of Christian brotherhood grows strong when it is deeply rooted in the person and the message of Jesus Christ. The source of Montfortian brotherhood is founded in the vision of our founder Father de Montfort who desired to make Jesus known through the works of evangelization for which Marian devotion is an essential means. The visit of General Councillor and the animator of the Montfortian European Entities, Fr. Marco PASINATO was a remarkable occasion for sharing and nurturing the Montfortian brotherhood and fellowship. The Belgian Delegation was happy to welcome him on 4th December 2021, to relish his binding presence with us in our midst.

As a brother who desires the good of all in the delegation and the growth of the entity, he visited the oldest house of the entity on 4th December in D'Hoppe where Fr. Jan TACHELET does the Montfortian mission. There we have a beautiful grotto dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. The statue of Father de Montfort which stands beside the grotto draws the attention of many pilgrims who continue to visit this holy place. The statue of Montfort is placed in such a way that it invites the pilgrims to trust in the motherly care of Mary and persuades them to imitate her simplicity and unwavering faith for reaching Jesus our saviour. Decades ago, our fathers also built here the stations of the cross to help people find God and His loving voice in nature and silence. It offers an ecological atmosphere for meditation and contemplation. On that day Fr. Marco also met Fr. Jan MEEUWS who also lives in that area. He is best known as itinerant preacher and missionary. He has been for years collaborating with Radio Maria.

Touched by the historic presence of Montfort missionaries which is almost a century old in Belgium, Fr. Marco spent the next day in Genk where we also have an old community in which there are three fathers (Frs. Jef, Joep and Nico) who were missionaries in Congo years ago. In this community, these aged fathers care for each other and live a life of prayer, brotherhood, and peaceful accompaniment. His visit to this community ensured them of our love and gentle care for them. This was indeed a wonderful gesture from Fr. Marco which showed them how gratefully the congregation acknowledges their selfless mission in Congo. He spent the whole day with them participating in their daily community life and listening to them.

The next day Fr. Marco spent in Kessel-Lo, a very recent and new community that came into existence in May 2021. Montfort missionaries who stayed for more than fifty years in Diestsevest, Leuven, had to move to this new house forced by a bad financial situation. We had to sell our old houses to ensure the continued Montfort presence in Belgium assisted by the arrival of young missionaries (Frs. Nepo, Ghislain and Aimé) from the growing entities such as India and Congo.

As a concerned brother, the next two days Fr. Marco met and had a personal dialogue with all the members of the community. Both old and young Montfortians were glad to express their plans and proposals for the future of Montfortian presence and mission in Belgium. Young missionaries were happy to share their concerns, difficulties and enthusiastic missionary ventures in the Belgian Church and were encouraged by the inspiring advice of Fr. Marco. On 6th December we also celebrated the birthday of Bro. Karlos with a festive meal. Frs. Frans and Jos VERBELEN are the two other fathers who live in this community while Fr. Marc lives in a service flat intended for aged people.

Leuven is blessed with one of the best-known Catholic universities in the world. And the faculty of theology is happy to help those religious congregations, which have been vanishing in Belgium due to lack of vocation to religious life, to prolong their presence and update their visions to respond to the current needs of the Church. Fr. Marco together with the Delegation Superior Jos and Fr. Nepo had a talk with the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean mentioned those possibilities through which young missionaries from the growing entities can avail of the academic excellence of the university. He also described the possibilities through which the faculty can assist us in our mission endeavours.

Then Fr. Marco also had a meeting with the promoter of Fr. Nepo to know about the progress of his doctoral studies and the possibilities for him to contribute to the Montfortian mission in Belgium after the completion of the Doctorate. And in the afternoon of 7th December, we had a community meeting in the presence of Fr. Marco. It was such an enriching movement. We shared with him our plans for the future and our faithful support for the growth of the congregation.

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the new delegation council was installed by Fr. Marco. Fr. Jos was appointed again as the Delegation Superior while two young missionaries Fr. Ghislain and Fr. Nepo were appointed as councillors. In the afternoon we had the first council meeting in the presence of Fr. Marco. He explained to us how much the General and his Council trust in the new team for a cordial collaboration for carrying out the mission of the congregation in the footsteps of our founder. He also reminded us of the many commissions that constitute the General Administration for the effective accompaniment in our mission and community life. Growing in Montfortian religious life is a continuous journey that requires Christian solidarity, communal cooperation, and ongoing formation.

On the last of his visit Fr. Marco had a meeting with a team which works in our Marian Centre. This is the team that is made up of largely young people. They are zealous to collaborate with us in our mission and Marian apostolate. Marian Centre organizes pilgrimages and is responsible for publishing Marian Magazine, entitled, *Maria, middelares en koningin* (Dutch) and *Marie, médiatrice et reine* (French). Young missionaries are already involved in this apostolate. Fr. Frans, as the director, has been guiding this Marian Centre till now.

The members of the Belgian Delegation are happy and highly value the visit of Fr. Marco. In his remarks, Fr. Marco expressed appreciation and gratitude to Belgian Montfortians for being open to welcome young missionaries in their entity.

He thanked them for their readiness to pass on their missionary legacy to young missionaries coming from other countries. He has also admired the enthusiasm of the aged missionaries to help the young missionaries inculcate in the vision of the founder and mission of the congregation. He also conveyed to us his conviction and confidence in a hopeful future for Montfortian Mission in Belgium.

Fr. Neolean James Raj, SMM