



The Ordination of Bishop Wismick Jean-Charles, SMM

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - On Saturday, August 3, 2024, the episcopal ordination of a Montfortian confrere from the Province of Haiti, Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES, SMM and Bishop Jean-Pierre Sander LOUIS JEAN, both appointed auxiliary bishops of the said Archdiocese on May 31, 2024 by Pope Francis, took place at the Parish of Saint Pierre de Pétiion Ville, Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince. Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES, because of his career and his various responsibilities, is very well known both nationally and internationally, both within the Montfortian family and the universal Church. This is one of the reasons why this grandiose event was experienced as a community, ecclesial and national event.

Born on November 29, 1963 in Petites-Desdunes, in the diocese of Gonaïves, after an experience with the Salesians, Bishop Wismick entered the Company of Mary, where he took his first vows on September 8, 1990, then he was ordained a priest on January 15, 1995. He was in turn parish vicar of the Saint Georges church of Bassin Bleu in the diocese of Port-de-Paix (1995-1997); Parochial Vicar of Saint Brigid Church in Westbury in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York (1997-2000 and 2009-2012) where he continued his training until obtaining a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology, a Master's degree in Education, a Doctorate in Psychology, a Certificate in Spiritual Direction (at Fordham) and a postdoctoral specialization in Global Mental Health (at Harvard University in Boston).

Upon his return home after his Master's degree in Counseling Psychology, he was appointed Director of the Collège Notre Dame de Lourdes in Port-de-Paix and Head of the Postulate (2000-2005);

Diocesan Director of “Justice and Peace” in the Diocese of Port-de-Paix (2002-2005); Master of novices of the Montfortians in Haiti (2005-2006); Advisor and Secretary of the Provincial Council of the Montfortians of Haiti (2002-2006). He was also, during his master’s degree in education and his doctorate in psychology, parish vicar of the church of Saint’Anne in Brentwood, New York (2006-2009).

In the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, he was Director of the Montfortian Marian Center in Turgeau; Founding Director of the Center for Evangelization, Spirituality and Mental Health CESSA (2010 to today); Vice-Rector for Academic and Scientific Affairs of the University of Notre-Dame of Haiti (2012-2017); parish priest of the Parish of Saint Louis Roi de France in Turgeau (2012-2017). Elected Assistant General, he was appointed Vicar General of the Congregation of the Montfort Missionaries (2017-2023); President of the International Commission for the Protection of Minors of the Company of Mary (2017-2024). Within the General Administration, he was responsible for North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the end of his term in the General Administration, Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES was preparing to resume his mission within the Montfortian Province of Haiti, when at the end of his short time of renewal in Rome, he received the appointment of Pope Francis on the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to his cousin Elizabeth. With this appointment, Bishop Wismick becomes the sixth Haitian Montfortian bishop after Bishop Joseph AUGUSTIN, the first Haitian bishop, Bishop Carl Edouard PETERS, founding bishop of the diocese of Jérémie, Bishop François GAYOT, former archbishop of Cap-Haïtien, founder of the Haitian Conference of Religious (CHR) and the University of Notre Dame D’Haïti (UNDH), Bishop Frantz Nicolas COLIMON, former bishop of Port-de-Paix, translator of sacred and liturgical books into Creole, Bishop Quesnel ALPHONSE, titular bishop of the diocese of Fort Liberté. It is precisely in this list of Haitian Montfortian bishops that the name of Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES is now included. Moreover, two essential elements prove his Montfortian religious affiliation. First, there is the blue color of the coat of arms, which evokes the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Patroness of the Congregation of Montfort Missionaries; second, the episcopal motto he chose: “Deo soli / God alone”, taken literally from the motto of the holy founder of the Congregation, Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. In fact, he wrote in the fifty-second Cantic: “God alone is my tenderness. God alone is my support. God alone is my wealth. God alone is all my good.” Alongside these elements is another symbolic element, rice, evoking the wealth of the peasants of Petites Desdunes in Artibonite, his land. As for the other ornaments: ring, miter and crosier, they were chosen because of their simplicity and modest price.

After the great emotions of the announcement and of his elevation to the episcopate and the preparation of the episcopal ordination ceremony, Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES was ordained bishop by Bishop Max Leroy MÉSIDOR, principal consecrator, assisted by two co-consecrators: Bishop Cardinal Chibly LANGLOIS, Bishop of Les Cayes and Bishop Quesnel ALPHONSE, SMM, Bishop of Fort Liberté. This celebration, as we had emphasized at the beginning, was at the same time a community, ecclesial and national event.

A communitarian event.

The Montfortian family present in Haiti, on the one hand, rejoices with joy and thanks God for having chosen one of its members for a particular mission of the universal Church in the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, that of auxiliary bishop. On the other hand, she bears the suffering of the Montfort Institute, a school for the deaf and dumb of the Daughters of Wisdom located in Santo, because of the act of vandalism by armed gangs. However, it is with joy, a feeling that is both fraternal and filial, that the Montfortian family present in Haiti, welcomed the words of the Superior General, the Very Rev. Father Yoseph Putra Dwi Darma WATUN, SMM, in this instance.

Many fellow Montfortian priests, religious men and women, and diocesan priests responded to the call. Despite the absence of many priests and religious who would have liked to participate, but who, because of the unstable and worrying situation in the country, were unable to make the trip, we noted the presence of about one hundred priests at the altar next to the bishops and more than two hundred religious men and women. We noted during the celebration a perfect harmony between the Montfortian family and the diocesan clergy of the archdiocese. Not only is one of the two co-consecrators a member of the Montfortian family, but also at the entrance procession, Rev. Sr. Nadige JEAN-CHARLES, Assistant to the General Administration of the Daughters of Wisdom, brought the crosier; Rev. Fr. Jean Jacques SAINT LOUIS, SMM, Provincial Superior of the Montfortian Missionaries, presented the new bishops; Rev. Sr. Lamercie ESTINFORT, Provincial Superior of the Daughters of Wisdom, gave the first reading; Rev. Fr. Lanès PHANOR, SMM, rector of the scholasticate, sang the litanies; Deacon Joasemsky BLANC proclaimed the gospel and accompanied the president of the celebration, Mgr Max Leroys MÉSIDOR, throughout the ceremony. The latter, in his homily, expressed his gratitude to Pope Francis and emphasized the gift of these two new bishops to the Church of Haiti.

An ecclesial event

After the entrance procession, just before starting with the celebration, a member of the clergy of the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, Rev. Fr. Edwine SAINT LOUIS proceeded to read the French translation of the two papal bulls, then two other priests of the Archdiocese walked the altar showing them to all. After this significant gesture which testifies to the authenticity of the appointment of Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES, SMM and Bishop Jean-Pierre Sander LOUIS-JEAN as auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, the Metropolitan Archbishop and President of the CEH, Bishop Max Leroys MÉSIDOR, assisted by the two co-consecrator bishops, and surrounded by almost all the bishops of the Episcopal Conference, begins the celebration with joy, faith and hope. Joy, in fact, was clearly visible on the Archbishop's face since, not having had an auxiliary bishop for several years, this double appointment will be of great support to him in his multiple responsibilities, in particular the triple function of teaching, sanctifying and governing. He expressed this joy and hope in his homily in these terms: *“This is the joy that God wants for us. These are the problems of life, selfishness, wickedness, crimes that constantly sadden us. We must work so that people live, so that there is joy, to flourish. The Church is not there to belittle people and give them a sad character. No. We must have a joyful character. Today we are sad, but day after day, we must become strong again.”* Also, in his homily, the prelate stressed that the ordination of the new bishops is at the same time a divine gift to the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, to the Church of Haiti and to the universal Church. And, since the Church must be a vector of positivity and renewal wherever it is, it must participate in the formation of the Christian and civic conscience of the people, Bishop Max Leroys MÉSIDOR says he hopes to see through these appointments a new breath of fresh air in the country because Haiti is not only a theater of violence, horrors of all kinds, it is also a land full of promise and evangelical faith. Faced with this observation, he launches a cry from the heart, a request for grace to the state authorities present: *“May you, by the grace of God, allow life, too long time lost in the meanders of fear, to resurface and resume its normal course”*.

A national event

The ordination of Bishop Wismick JEAN-CHARLES took place in a very difficult context due to the insecurity, political instability and poverty that reign in the country. Although the capital is controlled by armed gangs, the government and the police did everything possible to ensure that the episcopal ordination took place. The area of Pétiion Ville, the Saint Pierre church was highly secure and the Haitian State had made its structures available to the Church, particularly the premises of the

Provisional Electoral Council. We were able to note the presence of the President of the Transitional Presidential Council, Mr. Edgard LEBLANC FILS, the Prime Minister Mr. Garry CONILLE, the Minister of Justice, Mr. Carlos HERCULE, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Dominique DUPUY. We also noted the presence of some members of the International Community as well as representatives of the Institutions working in the country.

After a long silence, a long absence of activities, the episcopal ordination of the two new bishops constitutes a sign of hope for the Haitian people. This celebration is welcomed as an element of divine response, an assurance of God's closeness to the Haitian people in this time of disarray. Such considerations are made taking into account the prophetic mission of the Church which is to proclaim the Good News, to protect the dignity of human life, to promote social justice and peace, to remind everyone of God's promises which are: joy, hope and the salvation of souls.

Fr. Louis Marie Montfort Vladymir SOUFFRANT, SMM