



Vie montante internationale

Vida ascendente internacional

Life ascending international

International association of the faithful recognised by the Holy See on march 25th 1996

N° 71 - May 2015

The elderly in a changing world : **challenges and opportunities**



International Meeting

from 15 to 19 October 2014

in Namur (Belgium)

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View of Namur city.

President : Marta Melo Antunes

Executive committee : Gregoria Boyd (Peru), Monique Bodhuin, Jean-Michel Siméon (France)

Ecclesiastical Assistant : Mgr. François Maupu (France)

International office : 15 rue Sarrette 75014 Paris - France

Email : vminternationale@gmail.com

Web site : <http://mcr.asso.fr/dans-le-monde/>

Marta Melo Antunes
President



EDITORIAL

The 8th international meeting of Vie Montante Internationale / Life ascending international was held in Namur, in Belgium, from the 15th to the 19th October 2014.

The elderly in a changing world : challenges and opportunities. The theme of the Meeting was chosen before the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation, « *Evangelii Gaudium* », yet our Meeting touched on many of the points raised in it. I would therefore invite all of you to read, or to re-read, this important document from Pope Francis, as it acutely considers « *certain challenges which the world faces today* » (52-75) , and talks of the Church which should « go forth » (20-24). Of course the exhortation is addressed to all the Faithful, not especially to the elderly members, but Francis does invite « *everyone to apply the guidelines found in the document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is not to walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters* » (33)

The elderly in a changing world : challenges and opportunities. This subject reflects many of the questions and uncertainties which concern many people. This was noticeable in the number and the nature of the responses to the preparatory work sent in by 31 countries. On the basis of these replies, we organised the discussion groups into three :

- a sociological impression, presented by Mr. René Poujol ;
- «Thoughts from a Pastor » by Mgr. Jean-Luc Hudsyn ;
- alternative ways to continue living in our movements by Mgr. François Maupu and our new President.

Of course, the alternatives found by each of the movements will vary according to the different realities experienced in each region or continent. But we are united, during this last stage of our lives, in wanting to take up the challenges posed by our evolving world and Church.



SECRETARIAT OF STATE

First Section – General Affairs

From the Vatican, September 29, 2014

« To the participants in the 8th International Meeting of *Life Ascending International*

Informed of the 8th meeting of the Life Ascending International movement, His Holiness Pope Francis sends his best wishes for your work and shares the joy of the participants gathered for a reflection on the theme : « *The elderly in a changing world, challenges and openings* ». The Holy Father encourages you to live this stage of your life as a time of grace during with the Lord renews his call to protect and transmit your faith, to pray and intercede. By sharing with simplicity the wisdom stemming from your experience of life, may you be like trees that still bear fruit (see *Meetings with the Elderly*, 28th of September 2014) ! As disciples of Jesus, you are invited to get close to those who feel marginalised, in order to build together a more welcoming and more humane society. Entrusting the fertility of those days to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Father wholeheartedly gives the Apostolic Blessing to the organisers, to all the people gathered in Namur and to their families.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Secretary of State of His Holiness »



Vie montante internationale
Vida ascendente internacional
Life ascending international

Namur, 20th October 2014

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State to His Holiness

Your Grace

Those members who took part in the 8th International Meeting of Vie Montante Internationale thank you for the message you sent on behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis.

Marked as our world is by inequality, by violence, by the poverty inherent in many countries, they are conscious of the rôle that the elderly can and must play in order to bring the world Hope, and to find new ways of spreading brotherly love among the generations.

They are ready to take up the challenge.

Participating in our Movement's meetings, sharing each other's experiences of difficulties, of pains as well as pleasures, prepares them to go out into the world to mix with those who seek some sense in their lives, with the people they meet in the ordinary run of living or working : their children, their grandchildren, their friends and neighbours...

They are grateful for the Pope's recognition of the role of elderly people and of his support for their activities.

Please accept, Your Grace, the expression of our respectful affection for the Holy Father and the assurance of our prayers.

Bernadette CANTENOT
President

SECRETARIAT VMI : 15 rue Sarrette 75014 PARIS – France

N° DE COMPTE • Vie Montante Internationale • Identification internationale
• IBAN : FR76 30003 03283 00050410508 89 • BIC-ADRESSE SWIFT : SOGEFRPP

GOING FORWARD with confidence into an obscure future

Excerpts from Mr. René POUJOL'S Conference in Namur on 15 October 2014

Mr. René POUJOL, a well-known journalist, formerly Chief Editor of the French Catholic weekly « Le Pèlerin », friend and long-standing associate of MCR, offered to summarize the preparatory work submitted by VMI movements from 31 countries within all five continents.

It was not an easy task but proved fascinating since your contributions were so varied and expressed in such passionate terms (his words) the way the elderly people perceive the transformations of the world. The participants at the Namur conference universally appreciated his words as they were faithful to the texts that had been studied, and they gave a global overview to the whole.

You will find below just some of the **abstracts** we considered especially important **(1)**. We are sure they will encourage you to read the entire conference on the VMI Internet site.

J-M Simeon



The elderly and the challenge of the economic crisis

...After having examined the extreme variety of situations and the global problem of aging, Mr. René Poujol noted *that no country ...has escaped the consequences of the economic changes, whether caused by the crash of 2008 or by globalisation which always manifest itself in the form of unemployment – sometimes immense - rural exodus and urban explosion, increase in discrimination, decline of the middle classes so that a proportion find themselves returning to poverty while the already poor continue their descent into an even lower level of poverty...*

Large scale rural exodus is a general phenomenon in Africa and Latin America (Argentina, Colombia). However some countries – as **Uruguay, Colombia or Dominican Republic** - are experiencing some « *economic developmentbut with no positive impact on the standard of living of the population* ».

Economic problems are sometimes compounded by unique circumstances as the increase in tribal or ethnic wars (see documents from **Benin, Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania**)

A succession of related circumstances have contributed to financial impoverishment and social disintegration...This situation has dramatic consequences on

(1) *in italics in the text*

challenges and opportunities

the revenues and standard of living of the elderly in the « **Southern countries** ». Their often modest pensions, if there is one at all, are eroded. Many are forced to keep working beyond the age of retirement to provide financial help to their children or grand-children - hit by unemployment or victims of a breakdown of family life...



Mr. René Poujol.

In the « **developed countries** » we shouldn't think that the « virtuous » behaviour economics practices are especially beneficial to the cause of the elderly. We see a decrease in benefits, and increasing inequalities :

- In **Britain**, in health care
- In **Japan** too, as a result of the acceleration of the aging of the population (rapid decrease in birth rate)
- In **Australia** the explosion of public debt has forced the government to drastic cost saving measures...

Although other countries such as **Belgium** and **France** : have achieved parity in standard of living with the working population, it is clear that the living standards of retirees are again at risk as a result of the general economic situation.

The current situation, as harsh as it may be, may become a ferment of unity and solidarity between the members of your movements.

Unequal access to the new technologies

Most of the responses focused on two aspects, the **progress of modern medicine** and the resultant increase in life expectancy and well-being, and the **new communication tools** of are transforming the relationships between people via the internet.

Although our friends from **Senegal** were the only ones note the consequences of contraception on the sexual life of the young, consequently described as « disorderly », we can imagine that it is a source of anxiety for many of you. Senegal also remarked on the widespread copying of all things western. This fashion includes not only « imported » eating habits but also homes and the skin depigmentation. The consequences are well documented. They range from shifts in agricultural production, the disappearance of traditional homes and the appearance of the first retirement homes – a fact considered « unimaginable » till now. They also include public health and, even more importantly, a re-questioning of cultural identities.

The second revolution has been the use of **Internet**, where we observe how difficult the elderly members of society find it to embrace these technologies.

However, the economically developed countries in general, have continued to develop these new technologies and use them extensively, thereby gaining huge benefits as much from the acquisition of new knowledge as from the development of new interper-



An attentive assembly.

sonal relationships.

The tendency is to substitute « machine-to-machine » - impersonal – to traditional « person-to-person » human relations (**Hong Kong**).

In the **southern countries**, in addition to the limited approval so far accorded to technological progress, the problem for the elderly is generally one of **cost** especially in rural zones.

The Dominican Republic mentions another perverse form of exclusion « The elderly person who does not have the money to buy this technology is considered to be insignificant and not worth investing in because he or she isn't capable of learning ».



Elderly people in the midst of social upheaval

The response submitted by the **Dominican Republic** summarizes the situation of most of the countries in Latin America : « economic and social changes, and the situations of domestic violence, mean that in many homes the father figure is missing. The older generation may find themselves bringing up the children or taking on the running of the household and responsible for the



Albert and Aimée Grimaud (Benin).

survival of the family but, at the same time, potential victims of dependency and abuse. »

From **Guatemala** or **Argentina**, *« Although they have worked all their lives, elderly people do not receive an adequate pension. Sometimes they cannot even afford medical services. Their families see them as being of no value and they find themselves abandoned.*

This idea was taken up again by Pope Francis during a gathering of elderly people « The violence done to the elderly is as inhuman as the violence done to children. How often are elderly people left abandoned in a way that amounts to nothing less than disguised euthanasia ! It is another manifestation of the throwaway culture which is doing so much harm to the planet ».

The **African continent** is also facing the social and physical consequences of the huge rural exodus, and the uncontrolled urbanization. In **Tanzania** for example *« overcrowded urban centers have become ungovernable and the elderly people being held responsible for having left the country to get into such a mess. The hatred felt for them can lead to murder, in the guise of witchcraft. Disheartened, the old people are frightened to talk, to criticise, to complain about the materialism in today's society, the corruption, the immorality, everything which deepens still further the chasm that separates them from the modern world ».* And we find the same realities expressed in the responses from **Benin**, the **Mauritius Republic**, **Congo** and **Senegal**.

Some positives

René Poujol cites researchers indicating that :
« We do observe however certain factors showing the return to his former position in society of the old African, a situation that can be interpreted as a strategy to reinstate the traditional social norm, long threatened but still lasting and resistant ».
*In the documents we read « The elderly in **Guatemala** take responsibility for themselves and have shown that they can solve their own problems », in **Uruguay** « people help and support one another when it's necessary » We find the same testimony of « active solidarity » in Africa from **Senegal** « Old people are still the counsellors, the mediators, the conciliators » and from **Benin** : « In the countryside the older people still manage to preserve at least some family values ».*

Adapting to unsettling changes

*In much of the southern countries, the need to work for much longer means that many people go straight from being employed to old age, just as used to happen in the northern hemisphere until fairly recently. In contrast, in Western countries, an « **extra generation of young retired people** has emerged between the active population and the elderly.*

*« We must differentiate between active retirees, who are healthy and still active within society, and those who have reached the later stages of life and who become more and more dependent » say our **Belgian** friends.*

« The old people, however difficult and worrying it has been, have slowly come to terms with the new situation, and have accepted it without really understanding it. But owing to their love for their children and grandchild-

ren they generously contribute within the limits of their income and availability ».

That sums it up almost exactly the conclusion reached with regard to their own experience by all your participants, whether in **Africa**, in **Asia** or in **Latin America**.

Finding one's proper place in the Church

You describe a **lessening of religious practice**, even its total abandonment by the younger generations, although there appears to be some religious dynamism here and there.

Secularisation can be observed in the Southern countries where sects, prosper by « selling happiness. We see however the development of small, warm and fervent communities or of charismatic groups ».

But the paradox, mentioned by both the North and the South, it is the old people « the backbone of the Church, are unacknowledged yet wanting more involvement », (**Australia**). I read that the elderly are from **Portugal** and also from **Spain**, there are disappointed remarks that the episcopate remains deaf to pleas for a pastoral policy dealing specifically with the elderly.

The happy exception to this seems to be **Argentina**, where the pastoral document of Aparecida asks the Church, to pay total attention to old people, involving them in the task of evangelisation among other things, by means of preparing those who will render the « loving service »

We should keep this appeal in mind for it's possible that it holds the key for your Movement, considering the direction outlined by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation « Evangelii Gaudium », in which he seemed to want to promote an evangelisation based on goodness, neighbourliness and caring. The kind of evangelisation in which retired people would be quite at home.

Vie Montante : a taste for hope

Rene Poujol observes that the reports are showing a Movement « *in pain* » whose members are aging and have difficulty participating in activities that are being offered because of the economic and social environment and environment and where a lot of local chapters have disappeared.

And yet, what energy is to be found there ! Reading, one encounters again the original impulse of the movements to get the elderly out of their isolation, to offer them a place to meet and make friends, where sharing and spirituality come naturally...



Father Roman Chromy and Joanna Badura (Poland).

Special mention to the groups in **Latin America**. Probably because of a longstanding « awareness » and also because their economic and social levels of development are less stringent than elsewhere, they are able to plan for the future whereas others are still preoccupied with managing their survival.

This conviction that it is up to you to take part in a social transformation appears, in several European countries, including the Flemish region of Belgium : « We must be brave enough to act as a pressure



Some European delegates.

group. Even if our organisation is not large, we can join with others so as to make our voices heard by the politicians and the hierarchy. » or in **France** :

« It's time to « leave off looking at the signs of God's passage in our lives » and go out into the heart of the world to start promoting « new ways of living » or « new social policies » which could change society and advance the dignity of Man, remedying those insufficiencies which, as Christians, we are aware of ».

Apart from the social aspect of the meetings, which is important for the older members, we must strive to develop a plan for action which might possibly appeal to new younger members.

Living the path of brotherly love

One thing is clear for you : for many elderly people belonging to your Movement is a way of **escaping their isolation and remaining optimistic** through contact with others, even more important for some, in some countries, than being useful.

You are all also convinced that belonging to an organisation active on all five continents is an advantage (opportunity?) for each one of you. It enables you to broaden your perspective of other economic, social and cultural contexts. There is such a wide variety of contexts that it seems impossible for the Movement to

try and advance everybody at the same speed. However, these discussions encourage you to question what it is that stimulates the **solidarity, so tangible sometimes, and which it might be possible to create, or strengthen, in your own groups.**

To the big question, in the North as well as the South : **how to convince younger people to join you ?** René Poujol quotes his diocese where a Synod has just begun with the theme « **With Him, taking care of one another and sharing with all the joy of the Gospel** ». This theme is at the heart of Pope Francis' thinking, of his vision of what the new evangelisation should be : not a call to order or to a dogma or to morals, but first and foremost a progression among brothers along Man's pathway.

You have the feeling that that is doubtless the very heart of what unites your Movement. « Finding new methods of evangelising through living in brotherly love » as our friends from MCR in France propose. And it is echoed by this profession of faith from **Argentina** « The members of the Movement must be seeds of hope in a society in crisis. From our way of passing on our faith, of practising charity and brotherly love will come the harvest ».

This is a programme that younger people might accept (be receptive to ?) and René Poujol says : *That is my hope as much as it is yours. It's why I chose this as the title for my talk, this invitation which I found in the contribution from France and which forms my conclusion : « **Going forward with confidence into an obscure future** ».*



THE VIEW of a pastor

Excerpts from Mgr. Jean-Luc HUDSYN's conference
on October 16th 2014



Introduction

I have a lot of sympathy for your Movement ; I think that the situation of elderly people is of great concern to society and to the Church. As a bishop I feel strongly that the Church – as desired by Pope Francis - should reach out to the elderly too and help them to live this stage of their lives « *as a time of grace* ».

...In addition, I am fascinated by the diversity of the nations represented here. I do not have a world view of the questions which you, are discussing ; my view is very

local, within this multiplicity which makes up Belgium ...in a diocese close to where we are today and where life seems to bear little resemblance to that of Japan (even if my niece is married to a Japanese!), or to Peru or Tanzania...

But as we are living in a « world village » and all know the effects of « globalisation », I hope to be able to raise some questions relating to the « *challenges* » and « *opportunities* » which you are discussing. I shall do it very humbly, based on my real concern for the world of the elderly and looking at it from the human, spiritual and pastoral point of view.

1

A changing era with all that it implies

« *The elderly in a changing world* ». The world is certainly changing. We are not just experiencing short-term crises, momentary disruptions, where all that is needed is a slight adjustment ! We live at global level, globally we are undergoing changes to our traditional cultures... We can certainly understand that for old people (and also for the other generations) this results in feelings of disarray, and even of fear. Different kinds of fear : the fear of being inadequate, the fear of being rejected, and also the fear of having failed to serve as an example, the fear of having been wrong...

My question is this : what can be done about that fear ?

...So the question is not about doing away with one's fears. We have to live with them. The question is : **how to face up to fear, or anxiety, or insecurity. How, in the face of fear, to feel confident ?**

It's not by hiding behind false arguments ; those which simplify the questions or deny them ; it's not by burying one's head in the sand, saying : « Absolutely nothing must be changed ». It's not by being negative and changing the subject. **I would like to emphasise three points which might give your members some ideas to pass on to their groups and provide this interior calm when surrounded by the changing, and rapidly changing world.**

1.1. No interior calm without at least a few guidelines

It isn't possible to be confident without first acquiring an understanding of what is happening within culture,

within society, within our own thought processes and also within the Church...

To begin that process, that learning to understand the time we live in, there is a book whose title is : « *Love in spite of everything the 21st century* » by Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber published in 2012. This book does pose an interesting question : and if what is happening to us now is similar to what happened during the Renaissance - in Europe in the 14th century - a period of fascinating change but which nevertheless at the time was very unsettling and worrying for most people ? It is a question worth investigating thoroughly with the older generation : **regard our present era with a critical eye, certainly, but ask ourselves too what hopeful beginnings are there ? What is emerging ?**

It is important that the elderly do not drift into a sort of depressed nostalgia and from there tend to take refuge in an idealised view of the past...

The book I mentioned, begins with a joke : someone says « *Everything's going from bad to worse in this century* » and another person (no longer young) replies « *Yes, me too, I'm sentimental – The Great War, the slump of 1929, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Tchernobyl ...that was really cool !* »...

Bear in mind too that while one might rightly feel that christianity today is being eroded, we can certainly see it in Belgium at least, we shouldn't idealise the christianity of yesteryear. It had its great moments, it had its saints, quite a lot of them in fact. But if, in the past, in the western world we had churches which were clearly better attended on Sundays, we should nevertheless ask ourselves the question : « **Is it certain that we passed on the Faith to those people ?** » Not just the religion,

a vague belief in a God, a « *there must be something above us up there* » ...but rather « Did we teach the Faith as a personal relationship, as an existence with Christ, living intimately with God ?

...In the midst of transmitting the beauty of the faith, we must ask ourselves about the picture that we sometimes paint to people of the Christian vision of men and women, of our sexuality, of morals, of people who have known failure, of our engagement in economic or political life, of the importance of Creation, of the inseparable link between our faith and the search for justice, not as an ideology but as a passion for our fellow man rooted in the passion that God feels for each of us, that He feels for me !

Therefore, at the risk of a sharp and nostalgic attitude nowadays to a rather idealised past ; I feel it is important to give the elderly people in your care two points to bear in mind :

1 **To learn to understand the times we live in,** with its difficulties, its groping forward, its searching for answers, its occasional failures but also with its potential... Understanding in order to find ways forward means working towards one's mental health, working towards being a good citizen, working towards conscious optimism.

2 **To learn too to go to the heart of our faith.** The Christian faith is very comfortable with that : it has always emerged stronger after going through trying times in uncertain periods of history : during the Exile in the Old Testament, during the persecution of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, and regularly during the history of the Church. The Gospels were written for that reason – to lead from the Cross to the Resurrection. And baptism exists for that, to lead from the shadows into the light...

1.2. No interior calm without some spiritual understanding of Faith and Hope

In the face of fear the alternative to the Gospel is the Faith, it's having confidence... Faith is primarily trusting in the person of Christ, in what He himself believed. It's « *believing in Someone* ». It's believing in Christ, for whom God the Father was the cornerstone and the breath of His own life and hope. Faith and Hope do not therefore allow us to choose whether to be an optimist ! **For us Christians faith is « being faithful », being faithful to Christ, who said – while living through pain Himself – that in the midst of anguish, of sorrow, of darkness, we re not alone.** It's believing that the Resurrection is working now, in these our present days, and that the Holy Spirit is active. That even when the Holy Spirit is blocked here and there He does as Jesus did, He goes elsewhere, to where He will be welcome ...yet without reproaching the ones who seem not to want His presence. Hastening to return to them later in fact !

...Even if we are witnessing today the collapse of ideas we thought eternal and indestructible, it doesn't mean that there aren't ideas already germinating to replace them ...but they don't make much noise... I'm saying this because I believe it, and I see it happening. Even if the growth is underground the resurrection is nevertheless under way : in a country as unreligious as mine, there are people searching for God, there are people wanting to be baptised, there are people starting Gospel road again. **There are spiritual expectations among the young and religion, religions, are not « out of fashion ». On the contrary...**

We believe that in spite of the lives we lead and the crosses we bear His love will never leave us, even though our night be long and deep.

► Your Movement must nourish the Hope among the elderly

Ingmar Bergman's film « *Face to Face* » portrays a psychiatrist asking himself how to get out of his depression. A colleague tells him « *I have something I use with the people who don't believe in God. Every day you have to let yourself be touched by something, or by someone* ». A royal road all the more pertinent for those who believe in God, and who believe that He is at work in others ...an even in us. **Nourishing our hearts, nourishing our hopes and those of others through learning to « be touched » by what is beautiful, true, good, praiseworthy by training our eyes to be discerning, to give thanks, to be grateful.**

► Nurturing that which in spiritual terms in *Vie Montante* is called discernment : learning together to recognise God's plan for today, for my life, for the life of others, or for the world, or for the Church. Giving thanks, being awed, being grateful, these are all essential Christian virtues ...in fact it's the meaning of Eucharist !

1.3. No interior calm without communion within the community

Confronted with anxiety and also a feeling of powerlessness, the risk today is that one will lose one's confidence – in others, but also in oneself. There is too the feeling that something has been missed, as I said before : **how did we get to this stage, in society, but also more specifically in my own life, in my family ?** We feel defenceless.

This is why the company of others is important. There is no interior calm without communion within the community, without friendship with others. **This is why the groups are important, being a Movement which provides opportunities for building solidarity, for building rich relationships.** Your international dimension is important too, both for stimulating our thoughts, for comparing our lives with others' and for enhancing our knowledge.

Finally, we become confident of ourselves ; it comes from that shared love for one another. This is why the Church is important. The people who have retired, and particularly those who lived through what is known as « May '68 » as we call it, still often have problems with the Church. It's true that many knew the Church as very institutional, too authoritarian. They they felt it to be an repressive obstacle to their liberty ...

The young of today who call themselves Christian are the opposite of that in their relationship with the Church. Free they certainly are ! What they lack are guidelines. **Those who call themselves Christian only find that within the Church, during events like the World Youth Days.** These young Christians are also naturally « of the Church » because the Church was their door into the faith and into a brotherhood that they feel at home in. Their elders often left the Church by the side door ...sometimes it will be necessary to re-train them, to let them experience a way of being in church which is a valuable antidote to what they find threatening in our society : the loneliness, the rejection ; even the social isolation, especially in a time of shattered family relationships.

► *Vie Montante* has the advantage of offering the powerful attraction of joining a group, of communion.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that among the elderly ...one finds different generations of elderly. And they don't all share the same past. Nor all the same cultural backgrounds. Who don't all have access to the latest technological advances. I wouldn't go as far as the distinctions I found in a North American document about pastoral care for the elderly which distinguished between the young old (65-75... I belong in there), the old (75-85) and the very old (85 and older) !

How wonderful, when one is « *old* » or « *very old* » to still have places to go where one is listened to, respected, and where one can pray in real fellowship. **This is where belonging to the Church is a gift that has no equal.** Even though you have to accept that sometimes the different ages will also have different questions.

A time where reasons for hoping exist

2.1. Should we be so sure of having failed to pass on the Faith ?

It's a question often asked and never answered : **How much of our faith's great treasure have we passed on ?** It's important to remember that most of you became parents when there was a lot of rivalry in the field of education : the parents, the priest and the teacher were no longer the only ones teaching well-established values to the young. That has been done increasingly in a more and more contentious manner through TV, commercial radio, teenage magazines, the Internet, fashion trends ...and we became more and more like a voice crying in the wilderness...

But does that mean that nothing was taught ? The Gospel tells us : some will sow and others will reap ...sometimes much later... **Ask the mother of Saint Augustine how she felt during her son's wild years !** She has become the patron saint of many a parent nowadays !

And above all you, the older generation, must not think that you cannot implant the seeds of the Gospel, that you cannot continue to be the means of growing those seeds of the Gospel in the hearts of this generation of grandchildren, with whom you often have such close links...

Many of the older faithful don't dare, or don't believe that their own faith might be contagious. Even if the language is sometimes clumsy (but it's never too late to learn to express oneself clearly about your faith), **there are things you can pass on quite simply** : going into a church and explain what you can see, praying aloud for a moment, lighting a candle and explaining who you are praying for, reading a religious book or comic book

with your grandchildren, watching a DVD (hopefully a good one!) about the life of a saint, talking about what is important for you about your faith... (but of course, no sermons, no pressure, no criticism – total respect for their freedom!)

When I meet the groups of young people I am going to confirm, I often ask them : « *And for you, who was the example who brought you to Christ ? Who do you thank for making you want to be confirmed ?* » **Believe me, in the Top Ten people who helped most to make the young ones want to be Christians, very often it's the grandparents who are named. And very affectionately.**

This relationship with the grandchildren – since the parents' world is often taken up with work – is extremely important, it is a blessing (one finds this relationship with the older generation existing in other cultures too).

I would add in passing that learning to use the new technologies, as far as one is able, is a must : learning to use an IT tablet, send an e-mail, use Skype and even Facebook ...for it is an extraordinary opportunity for contact to use even with the young : first of all they can give you a hand for in this area they know everything.

But communicating in this way with all the generations, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren – they love it ! Receiving an e-mail or a text from you grandmother – **fantastic !**

► And what about giving Beginners' Workshops on the subject ? I would find that a true service on behalf of our mission, in communion and in communication, getting people together socially and even in Church ! It would be another way to combat exclusion too.



2.2. We are living in a time which is rediscovering the importance of « the intergenerational »

Are we bit by bit discovering that weakening links with the older generation feels like a disadvantage ? At least you made clear in your replies the importance of « *the intergenerational* ».

Even in the catechism classes in the regions you put community catechism classes where the generations mix, where the children grow together in the faith but where above all one grows in faith thanks to other people, of all ages.

Methods of mutual collaboration are being sought which should be adopted by Christian groups, by parishes and by schools through getting in touch with the world of the elderly, although it can also be done the other way

round : the elderly could offer assistance to the young and there is no shortage of ideas : help with homework, teaching the language to young immigrants, talking about their life and their faith (even including speakers who are immigrants themselves).

2.3. Growing old : an opportunity to develop one's Faith and one's spiritual life

Being at work often has the effect of dulling the importance of meaningful questions of Faith : one didn't have the time, it didn't seem that important ! We all had a thousand excuses for thinking about something else.

But when one gets old one has time to think, to read, to listen to the radio and the tv, to talk to others ...and

then the questions come back to the surface - about faith, perhaps about long-forgotten doubts, about the Creed, the Bible and the interpretation of the Scriptures, about Christian morals, about prayer, the Sacraments, about the Mass itself, about reconciliation and pardon (a question often very pertinent in a lot of families), about death, resurrection, eternal life (not always a theoretical question either, for oneself or if one's spouse dies...)

Elderly people often realise that in these conversations it is difficult for them to 'explain their faith' or to talk about it coherently... We don't really have the words we need... **The good questions are the ones which allow us the chance to increase our knowledge of the faith and gain a better understanding of the faith experience ; which make us better witnesses to our faith.** This shows that even after a lifetime of being a Christian we must still continue to cultivate, still continue to enlarge, to nourish our faith and discover, like Nicodemus, that we can be born again to God, even when one is old. And that it never ends !

► This is the benefit of organisations like *Vie Montante*, where one is respectfully invited to pose all these questions, to observe others' ways of living their faith and of saying their prayers, and of having qualified people answering them.

They increase the confidence of the older generation, encourage them to be proud of their faith and to share it as one would share a prize, the joy of peacefully witnessing.

Among the questions, obviously, one too often skirted around in our sophisticated world : the question of death.

A French (Catholic) writer, of Chinese origin, François Cheng, wrote a little book recently with the title « *5 Meditations on Death, or alternatively, on Life* ». He shows how this subject is often evaded, side-stepped in order to give substance to our actual life – whatever is left of it. As he says, **taking greater responsibility for**

our death would make us better participants in the grand Adventure which is our life. Each of us should be creating our life till the very end.

As we age we are confronted with more and more experiences of death, be it a spouse, a relative or a friend. The Christian Hope is sometimes confused because many of us have mental images of Heaven, the Resurrection and Eternal Life – sometimes confused and often a bit childish, not always rooted in Holy Scripture.

► What I retain is this : pastoral care for the elderly cannot avoid entering into discussions about death ...and about life. I believe we reach an age where it is important to come to terms with death, to stop avoiding the issue and instead to evaluate how my death, the death of others, the death of Christ, could have some meaning, could bring me peace and paradoxically help me to start living again.

2.4. « The third age, a time of grace » says Pope Francis

This Pope, aged 78, is really someone who can give us all hope ! He talks a lot about the elderly. He criticises the lack of humanity which will bring forth a world which scorns them, and tells them that there are too many of them. **Too often we are tempted to talk about old age as « a problem ».** Why don't we talk about them rather in terms of their *potential* ?

► This brings me to the question of Retirement Homes becoming more and more numerous, at least in this country. How can your Movement get in touch with these people ? How can you offer them the chance to discover what you could mean for them ?

3

These great and inspiring Biblical figures who were « elderly »

➤ Elisabeth welcomed the young Mary, calmed her fears as a young woman, as a young mother : who tells the young woman that she is blessed ! Who confirms the Child she is carrying : « *made the child leap in my womb* ». Elisabeth discovers that even in old age one 's life can start again, one can bring life into the world, it is never too late.

➤ A challenge – to be one of the people who reassure others in this troubling and troubled world - because they have worked on their own inner calm.

➤ As the Pope said « *Elisabeth and Zachary were not experts in parenting, but they were experts in the Faith, experts in God, experts in that hope which comes from God* ».



I must add that Zachary became dumb when he was old. For him, being a priest, it must have been a great trial to have to keep quiet for six months. I suppose it taught him to listen – to listen to his wife and to others !

➤ A challenge : to be an old person who knows how to listen, not to pontificate, not to be someone who talks endlessly about their past but who is curious about the lives of others. Someone who accepts that he or she doesn't have the answer to everything, but who has some experience of life and of Faith.

➤ Then there is the prophetess Anne, who spent her old age praying in the Temple. And Saint Theresa of Avila who reminds us that we are each a Temple where God has made His home in our innermost being. **To be one of the elderly who pray and who carry others with them, in the Church and in the world !** Who protect the world with their prayers, according to an Orthodox expression.

➤ And then there is Symeon, who took the Baby Jesus in his arms – **to be one of the elderly who have a tender heart and tender hands for the youngest ones, sometimes so tormented by the world we live in.** Symeon sees in the Child the whole future He will have, all the opportunities he will represent for all men. **To be someone who encourages the young into the future, who opens their eyes to the future.** Symeon sees the trials that Mary will endure as a mother. To be someone who feels the pain and suffering of their own children without judging them, without saying « *If I were in your place I would have done so-and-so* ». **To be someone who doesn't put themselves in the place of the young person ...but who gives them confidence and affection so that they can invent their own place !** Finally, to continue to inspire life and like Symeon to be able to glorify God in a prayer, saying « *Today my eyes have seen the Glory* ». To be able to say that will keep you young !

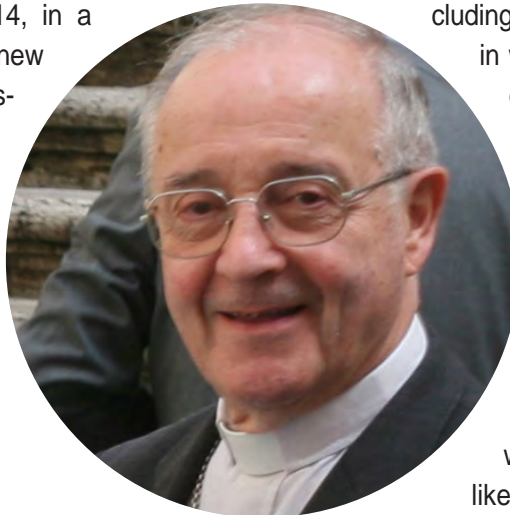
† Jean-Luc Hudsyn
*Auxiliary Bishop of Brabant,
Archdiocese of Malines-Bruxelles*

LIVING

in a changing world

(Mgr. François Maupu)

Mankind lives, in 2014, in a world marked by new inventions and disputes. For the elderly, mankind didn't start in 2014. That is fortunate : experience thus allows us to step back and compare. But it can also be a disadvantage : we are less able to adapt and may even be beset by the fears which Mgr. Hudsyn spoke of yesterday.



cluding the hippie movement, which started in western Europe but which had repercussions in many other countries. The young adults and adolescents of 1968 are the senior citizens of today. All are not still revolutionaries, but they have all been influenced.

► What are these new inventions ?

Mondialisation which causes frontiers to collapse, changes in the work market and a new way of visualising international solidarity.

Secularisation changes in religious practices, abandoning of traditional teaching methods. Where there is secularisation, there is no longer a predominant religion. **As there is no longer any imposed common reference point, each one is free to build his own set of beliefs.** It becomes a religious hotch-potch : we might borrow from Buddhism for example. But this lack of a point of reference also leads to the emergence of a religious leader, (spiritual teacher, guru, imam) who will suggest an apparently satisfactory combination : there is therefore a great risk of falling into sectarianism, or of becoming an integrist, whether Christian or Muslim. In the preparatory work done by Colombia, we find the phrase : « *Each one arranging his faith to suit his life* » : (Acomodando su fe à su vida).

Two « ism » words popular with the theologian Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI typify the present world and our own era :

Relativism (« everything is worthwhile »), with reference to the events of May 1968 . That movement, in-

Individualism (« it's good because it pleases me »), which even refers to those traditionalists who choose a liturgy because they like it, it suits them, it offers an environment which matches their expectations. I surprise them when I tell them that their choice, in favour of the Pius V Mass is in line with today's world. They must discover that the Church is something other than a collection of pious individuals.

The elderly are a part of this society. The characteristics cited above apply to them even if they try to resist.

I would add that this world and this civilization need, according to Pope Paul VI, not teachers but witnesses. **Mgr. Hudsyn mentioned it with reference to the transmission of the faith by the grandparents.** I found in the newspaper « La Croix » recently this description of the French writer Alexis JENNI (Prix Goncourt in 2011) : « *Jenni spent a long time reflecting on the meaning of his life, notably by way of Buddhism, then he returned to the Christian faith – which was the faith of the person he had most admired in the world, notably his grandfather. As a child Christianity had seemed heavy going. He came back to it through sensitivity* » (Bruno Frappat. La Croix 4-5 october 2014).

► A movement for the elderly in this world

I choose the word « movement » rather than the canonical « association of the faithful » in order to underline the life, the vitality, the dynamism that one hopes the Christians who belong to it will enjoy.

Movement : that which moves, takes the initiative, renews itself (I certainly find admirable those groups made up of the same people over a long period, but it worries me too. Yesterday I met a priest : 50 years ordained, 50 years with the same family groups !).

- teams (groups) which welcome new members, where the newcomers find their place (whether they are young retired people or not, that's another question).
- teams where responsibilities change hands, are only held by the same person for a certain agreed period of time. This point is not always evident in our Christian organisations.

► The Church

I recall what Mgr. Hudson said : as if we were a family : « *I choose my friends; I don't choose my brothers and sisters* ». A Vie Montante group is not a « club ». When one wants to form a team it's best to understand one another ! That can be the beginning of a friendship.

This movement, this association (of people who live in the real world), is built on three pillars. Three pillars ensure its stability. If one is missing, the construction will not stand up. Traditionally, the three pillars were : friendship, spirituality apostolate. The Vie Montante Internationale booklet suggests another formula (slightly longer) : « *live in brotherly love* », « *deepen our Faith and Spiritual Life* », « *translate our Christian commitment into concrete acts within society and within the Church* ».

► Live in brotherly love

René Poujol has already quoted what Guatemala wrote : « *There are people who had an unhappy childhood or adolescence and who find in the group, for the first time ever, a feeling of belonging, of being accepted and loved. The Vida Ascendente group is a haven of peace*

and joy where we can be ourselves and say what we think. We are not alone and we can be useful to others ». The Dominican Republic writes: « *On joining the Movement, life gets better..... friendshipcreativity* ». Portugal talks of « *we organise holidays for people alone and without protection* ». **The movement helps to fight against isolation, loneliness, reminds us of the dignity of people.** It allows us to experience the Church in a happy way, to be thrown in at the deep end. For those who belong to the movement, this is their experience of the Church. They can witness before their grandchildren (and before their children too) that this is the Church, a place of brotherly love and fulfilment.



A friendly atmosphere.

At this point I want to mention what Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, « *The Joy of the Gospel* » (no. 87), about the new forms of communication (which has been mentioned several times and which is often cited in the preparatory work); he invites us to participate in : « *the flood-tide of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood-tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage. Greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone. If we were able to take this route, it would be a very good thing, very regenerating, very liberating and would generate many memories* »...

► Deepen our Faith and Spiritual Life.

Putting Faith into our life, putting life into our Faith. The booklet issued by Belgium and Switzerland (also used by Rumania) emphasises the importance in each meeting of the « *Sharing of Experience* ». Naturally Vie Montante encourages one to discover statements made by the Church : « *We learn about various aspects of our Faith which had been neglected* » (Dominican Republic), about the Cate-



Ralf Chi-Chiang (Asia coordinator).

chism and the Credo. **But the movement also invites us to share those everyday experiences where we meet God, where God calls us.** To talk about our lives because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. This sharing of our daily lives offers us the opportunity of reading and re-reading the Gospels. Contrary to what is written at the end of some novels, all resemblance to actual circumstances is not coincidental. But we need to work at it (and be guided) in order to read our lives by the light of the Scriptures. Don't we recognise ourselves for instance in the attitude of the Samaritan woman, (St John's Gospel ch 4) when, in order to escape Jesus' questions about her way of life, she begins to talk about religion : « *Our fathers worshipped on that mountain, you Jews say that it's at Jerusalem...* ». Escaping from an interrogation about one's private life by starting a discussion about religion !

The spiritual life has its place within the life of a group in the exchange of experiences, of recalling an event on one's life journey, the joys, the difficulties, the commitments.

Mgr. François Maupu.



Monique Ptak, Monique Bodhuin and Alain Henry.

One is invited as a group to go from the sharing of the Gospel to the study of a social problem, or a social event or a human problem while meditating on it in the light of the Gospel.

« *Remember* » wrote Guy Villaros a former president of MCR, the French movement, « *that the primary mission of a Christian is not to explain the world, not to educate, but to change hearts* ».

► **Translate our Christian commitment into concrete acts within society and within the Church.**

The apostolate of those who try to link life and their faith leads them towards others, to suggest friendly meetings on social subjects which might interest them. Belgium writes : « ...inviting people from outside the movement, taking a stand on the ethical problems which concern us and joining in with other movements which defend the rights of the elderly ». And Rumania : « We organise pleasant and attractive activities with time for relaxing and sharing. Some members of Vie Montante write poetry or prose or do painting ; we join in similar activities organised by other Associations ».



Gregoria Boyd and some Latin America representatives.

The Belgians also write : « Even though our organisation isn't big we can join together with other groups so as to make our voice heard in the world of politics and in the Church ».

This commitment to the debates about human dignity in today's world, against the inequalities and world hunger is done : « not like the generals of defeated armies, but more like simple soldiers in a

squadron which carries on fighting ».(Pope Francis, « The Joy of the Gospel » no. 96)

► **And prayer ?**

This is not a fourth pillar. This has its place in each of the other three. Mgr. Hudsyn talked to us about the tears of Saint Monica which were her prayers for the conversion of her son Augustin.

Anne-Marie Couvreur, one of the three people who started Vie Montante, wrote a book called « The Evening Offering » ; (« L'Oblation du Soir ») when at the end of one's life the only service one can offer to one's brothers is prayer.

The oldest active members don't resign themselves to this being their only mission while they still have life left in them. But they remember the words of Ely Hillesum, quoted by Mgr. Hudsyn ; tell God how one wants to help Him, how much one wants to help Him.

Conclusion

I want to finish on a stimulating note so I shall mention two names : first, **Madeleine Delbr el**, a Frenchwoman who died fifty years ago (9.10.1904 to 13.10.1964) and was a Social Worker in the communist town of Ivry-Sur-Seine, an area that was called the « the red suburb ». A model missionary in a working class suburb, this mystic chose to take up the challenge of indifference and dialogue with the Communists. She is a good example to us of following the simple way of the Gospel among ordinary people.

The other name is that of **Pope Francis** who suggests to us in « The Joy of the Gospel » : « Let us not abandon ourselves to an individualistic sadness which comes from a selfish and miserly heart. With Jesus joy is born and reborn constantly... Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope... Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of brotherly love... Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the missionary force ». (The Joy of the Gospel nos : 86 to 109).

New PATHWAYS

(Marta Melo Antunes)

During the first two days of our Meeting we reflected on the changes that are taking place throughout the world in society at large and in the Church. Now we shall examine together some of the new ways in which our movements can take up the challenges facing us.

According to the replies that you sent to our Questionnaire, there are certain key themes. Firstly there is the desire **to find ways of attracting others to our Movement**, that is, to find new ways of showing those outside it how we express the faith that results from our baptism. This new attitude of witness is necessary because of the way society has changed in lifestyle and in outlook - bringing about changes which can shake us to our foundations.

► **What must we do to become seeds of hope in this new world ?**

The preparatory work done in each country has already shown what initiatives can be taken to develop new ways of working so as to take up the challenge posed to our movements, making them more visible to outsiders, or indeed to uninformed insiders.

Here are some of them :

- **Hold** and publicise events, debates, talks and Open Days for discussions about subjects of topical interest, and inviting capable speakers along regardless of their background or religion ;
- **Establish** links with relevant groups in your neighbourhood or area ;
- **Take** a public stand as a group regarding current bioethnic or family issues ;
- **Defend** the rights of the elderly in general by participating in activities with other organizations and movements ;

- **Get to know** about people approaching retirement age in your area, or parish, to inform them of the Movement and invite them to a meeting ;
- **Make a point** of increasing the scope or the role of the Movement in your locality, being aware particularly of cases of potential isolation or loneliness.

We are aware of another cause for concern : that of sharing and showing our faith.

We can observe, just as in our families, with regard to our children and grandchildren, as in society at large, that Christians are now often in the minority. **So to evangelise, to spread the word of the Gospel, has to become a personal responsibility for each of us nowadays.** And it is the responsibility of our Movement too. This doesn't mean long lectures or great undertakings. It simply means being in our daily lives, in our everyday contacts – at home, at work, in our free time and in our town or our village. Faith isn't passed on through recommendation or instruction. Faith is passed on through example. And this is where our activities, our concrete examples of Christian witness, are a vital sign of our faith. Otherwise, mere words are empty of meaning.

We must react. We must take part in real, meaningful projects.

Each Christian is called to be of service to others according to his vocation and his capabilities. It wouldn't be right for Vie Montante to remain untouched by this new dynamic.

The need to improve internal aspects of the workings of the Movement was also a key theme in the preparatory work you did. The world is changing and our Movement, like other institutions both inside and outside the Church, must adapt.

«Renew» and «Rejuvenate» are words you often used in your replies.

You want renewal in order to respond to the hopes and aspirations of the younger generation of retired people. In order to promote expansion in our movements we



Monique Ptak (Europe coordinator), Elio Abreu (Portugal) and François Mercay (Switzerland).

must first of all promote the expansion of our members. **To develop their faith, examine their view of life, broaden their view of events and circumstances elsewhere in the world** ...that can only be done through constant instruction and training. And since the subject of training causes anxiety among most of the countries who sent in their preparatory work for the Meeting, let us stop there for a moment and consider it.

Today, more than in the past, ongoing training is necessary for each of us.

Taking time to learn and better understand the use of new technology is essential for communicating with the younger generations and for being part of our increasingly global world. Our movements must not simply prepare their members to be able to respond to the communication revolution but must also encourage the more timid ones to get to grips with new technologies.

Really knowing what Vie Montante's objectives and intentions are is an obligation for all its members and especially for the group leadership. The training of Leaders should be a priority for all national representatives.

Neither can we ignore instruction in the faith. Life constantly poses us new dilemmas and it demands that we know who and what we ourselves believe in, and why. We need

to widen our own knowledge, to educate ourselves and be informed. For the most part, our movements already organize retreats, conferences and other training opportunities. **These activities should provide us with a clear and solid faith, sustained by the Sacraments and based on both God's word and the social philosophy of the Church.** All this requires our ongoing commitment. I think that starting with a faith which is personal to each individual and which encourages a responsible and personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ is the key to achieving a spirit of renewal within the Movement.

It's the regular group meetings which promote and allow ongoing training and support of the personal and collective efforts of the members, and this in turn justifies the importance of training courses for Leaders.

It is true that the problems are not expressed in the same way in all regions and continents. The opinions given in the preparatory work done by the different countries show that there are wide differences of opinion on the role of the Movement in these changing times. However, it matters little where we live for we are all called upon to live our faith openly and to express our belief in the inspiration afforded by the Movement. It isn't an easy task. It requires us to have the courage to change, to find the right responses to the world's current needs, this world that God has placed in our care. **But we believe in the promise of the Holy Spirit, and in that promise we find our confidence and our hope.**

Annual general assembly

19th october 2014

Reports 2010-2014

The following documents were read and approved :

- Reports from the Continental Co-ordinators
- Report from the Executive Committee
- Financial Report

► Admittance

The VMI movement of the Dominican Republic was unanimously granted admittance.

► Modification of the Statutes

At the request of the Pontifical Lay Council, Article 4.1 has been modified as follows :

It (the General Assembly) elects the members of the Executive Committee : President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary.

This provision will come into force only after receiving the approval of the Pontifical Lay Council.

► Elections

Président : Marta MELO ANTUNES (Portugal)

Coordinators :

- **Africa :** Jean-Christophe DIEDHIOU (Senegal)
- **Latin America :** Gregoria BOYD (Peru)
- **Asia :** Ralph CHI-CHANG (Taiwan)
- **Europe :** Monique PTAK (France)

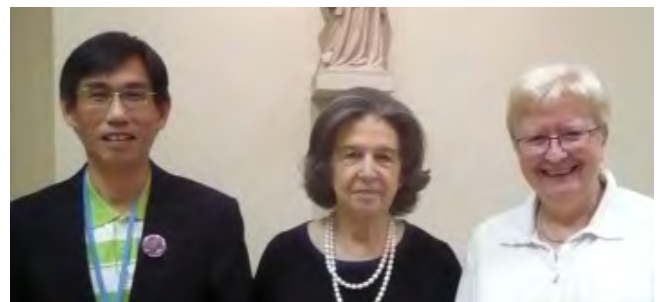
► Subscriptions

As stated in Article 4 of the Statutes, the General Assembly has fixed the amount of Subscriptions for the next 4 years. The subscriptions (in Euros, per year and per member) are organised into 4 groups according to the standard of living in each country.

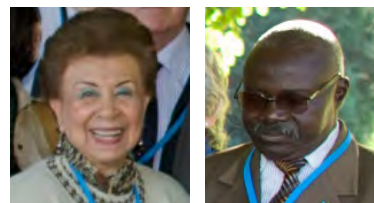
2015 & 2016	0,30	0,25	0,16	0,10
2017 & 2018	0,35	0,30	0,17	0,11



The Assembly gave its warm thanks to Bernadette CANTENOT for her devotion and dynamism during the years she spent as President of the Movement.



Ralph Chi-Chang, Marta Melo Antunes and Monique Ptak.



Gregoria Boyd and Jean-Christophe Diedhiou.

Conclusion

We have spent this whole week sharing our joy and enthusiasm with one another and we ended it in a festive concelebrated Mass with our priests and Mgr. Maupu.

We brought the Mass to an end with this prayer, asking Our Lord to give us new energy before we set off on our mission :

Lord, this week we have been united in your name and now you are sending us off, back to our own countries with the mission of caring for others and sharing with all of them the Joy of the Gospel.

You ask us to seek for new ways to respond to the challenges posed by a changing world. You call on us to offer a new approach and to be faithful to the spiritual gifts of our Movement.

Help us to go forward with confidence and to live the path of brotherly love.

We offer you our frailty, our anxiety, our fear.
Help us to face up to them with confidence.

Give us your blessing Lord, as you send us on our way.

Marta Melo Antunes.



Participating countries

Argentina
Australia
French-speaking Belgium
Dutch-speaking Belgium
Benin
Brazil (*)
Burkina Faso (*)
Cameroon
Canada francophone
Canada
Colombia
Costa Rica
Ecuador (*)
Spain
France
Guatemala (*)
Hong Kong (*)
Mauritius
Japan
Mexico (*)
Paraguay
Peru
Portugal
Poland
Dominican Republic
Congo Democratic Republic (*)
Rumania (*)
Senegal
Switzerland
Taiwan
Tanzania
U K
Uruguay

() countries participating
in the preparatory work only*

