



## **IPCI General Assembly in India**

**O**n 2nd February, Fr. General and the definitor in charge of India met with the IPCI General Assembly consisting of 7 Provincials and one of their councillors, 3 Regional vicars and two provincial delegates. The primary objective was to meet Fr. General who was in India at the conclusion of

the pastoral visitation of the province of Andhra Pradesh. There were few communications from the part of the General administration and there was a discussion on the Indian members present outside their territories and about the forthcoming extraordinary Definitory in India in 2019.

## **Indian nuns with Fr. General and the Definitor**

**O**n 3rd February, Eucharistic was celebrated by Fr. General and the Definitor along with all the provincials and all the Prioresses of Indian Carmel and the office bearers of the three associations in India. Our sisters gathered at Hyderabad to meet Fr. General and discuss on some of the important issues connected to Indian Carmel and to clarify some of their doubts regarding the Vultum Dei Querere. Indian Carmel consists of 34 monasteries of which the latest community at Kolayad

in Kerala was inaugurated on 29th January. Hence 34 prioresses and 11 office bearers of the associations were present. Fr. General was present on 3-4 and Fr. Definitor concluded the meeting on 5th evening.

It was really a moment of communion and strengthening of the charismatic identity of the Indian Carmel. Fr. General's interventions and words of encouragement to live the charism faithfully were very much appreciated by all the representatives of Indian Carmel.

## News from the Timor mission

Recently, on the 31st of January, there arrived in East Timor the last of the missionaries who, for the moment, will be incorporated into this Young Teresian Carmel presence. It is Fr Nuno, a Discalced Carmelite, born in this country, who has just finished his studies in Portugal.

Our missionaries continue their pastoral activities, while they are hoping for the definitive incorporation into the community of the new member who, at present, is spending a few days with his family.

Fr Noé, from Timor, teaches in some diocesan schools and spiritually accompanies seminarians, among many other duties.

For his part, Fr Antonio González, (a Spaniard from the Iberian Province), has joined the formation team of the

Preparatory Seminary, as assistant to the spiritual director. He also teaches History of Spirituality and also, this year, Spiritual Discernment. He is also accompanying four formative communities of religious Sisters, by retreat or formation days and accompanies postulants, novices and junior Sisters. We also help out in a couple of parishes. There is an intense task to accomplish in offering this service of spirituality and formation in this Church.

The arrival of Fr Nuno allows us to think about the possibility of going in search of vocations, but the situation continues to be quite precarious. We are praying to the Lord of the vineyard to awaken the call to the missions in some of the friars who could strengthen this nascent presence.

# A belated Christmas – and dreams as big as trees

*Newsletter from the Carmel in Bangui, 20 –22 January 2018*

**W**here does it say that we always have to celebrate Christmas on 25 December? On the calendar naturally, as my more observant readers will tell me. You are right, of course. Every calendar, sacred or profane, has 25 December marked in bright red letters to remind us all, from the most to the least observant, that this is the day on which the Most Important Person in history was born. But in the rainforest, with its dearth of calendars and liturgical experts, Christmas tends to arrive when the missionary arrives. And if you have a little time to spare, I will tell you about my second Christmas, one I had not expected which I celebrated in the Congo River rainforest, the greatest rainforest on the planet after the Amazon forest.

Generally speaking, during the days that follow Christmas – which I can assure you we at the Carmel also celebrated on 25 December, as the Church prescribes – we allow ourselves a few days of rest and fraternal fellowship, with perhaps a little trip out somewhere. This year we decided to head for the village of Bambio, where Brother Regis was born, 28 years ago. Bambio is around 180 miles (290 km) from Bangui, in the southwest corner of the country on the fringe of the Congo River rain-

forest. In order to reach this small sub-prefecture of Sangha-Mbaéré, you have to travel a long stretch of what is known as the Fourth Parallel, 4° north of the equator. Many sections of this road are in extremely poor condition. On two occasions our cheerful ‘caravan’ of 12 friars was obliged to push the car when it got stuck in the sand. We arrived in Bambio as night was almost falling. Just before we entered the village, we realised that we were already expected. The uncle of Brother Regis welcomed us with a smile, delighted at our arrival, and invited us to continue. Welcoming a missionary is something gladly done and generally quite customary. But 12 friars all together, all at once, was something they had never seen before in Bambio.

On arriving at the house of Brother Regis’ parents we realised that not only were we already expected but that our stay there had been organised down to the last detail, with a programme that would have been the envy of the best travel agencies and the most luxurious hotels. The entire village had literally mobilised for us. The proverbial African welcome was seen at its very best in Bambio. No sooner had we arrived that we were ushered into a dining hall built specially for us, a rectangular paillote, covered in bamboo leaves. And the women at once

offered us fresh water or a cup of hot coffee to restore ourselves after the long journey. I chose coffee, which is something you do not buy here but which everyone cultivates for himself, just a few metres from the home. I took hold of the large white-enamelled aluminium mug and slowly sipped at the coffee – and could taste in it all the aroma of the forest, all the hard work of those who had grown it and the warm hearts of those who had prepared it. And I thought of the rest of you, anxiously searching for your “premium quality coffee” on the shelves of some boring supermarket...

We had been intending to sleep on the ground, as best we could, in the parish centre. But no way... A wonderful little wooden house had been made ready for us to sleep in, painted in deep blue, looking as beautiful as if it had only just been built. Our “apartment” consisted of four rooms, with mattresses for each person and a comfortable sitting room, which we adopted as a place of prayer and recreation. As the missionary, I got a bedroom all to myself, with a bed larger than the one in the monastery, plenty of mosquito netting and a little bedside table. Needless to say, all these privileges granted to the clergy were a source of envy and barbed comments on the part of my dear confreres...!

But of course, in addition to eating and sleeping, the guests must also have a place to wash in. We had all

assumed that for these three days we would have to go without our daily shower, given the difficult conditions of the journey. But on the contrary, the village had prepared a bathhouse specially for us, observing all the niceties. And to the undersigned went the honour of inaugurating the new bathhouse, set up just a few metres from our accommodation. And here was Théophile, the youngest brother of Fra Régis, an impeccable major-domo, ready to supply our every need and to whom I tried to explain that my home town of Monferrato was almost as beautiful as his forest. With a look of firm decision he presented me with a splendid bucket full of water and explained – to a missionary undoubtedly accustomed to rather more refined toiletries – how you wash yourself in the forest. And a little later I can hardly believe that I am able to wash in hot water, with a brand-new block of soap, here in this corner of the Congo rain-forest, in a bathhouse of wood and metal sheeting, with nothing but the stars for a roof.

During supper we discover that no priest has been to the village for some months and that as a result they have never celebrated the Christmas Mass. A mutual glance of understanding is sufficient between the brothers and myself: Tomorrow will be Christmas Day! The village was quickly informed. The following morning, all the people, in their Sunday best, began to gather the

church and at 9 a.m. sharp Bambio's belated Christmas celebration began. I discovered with pleasure that even though the priest had not come, nonetheless, the little church had been decorated festively, because the community had gathered there to pray on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. The head catechist of the village was almost apologetic, saying, "If we had known in time, we could have organised better and had at least one baptism!" During the celebration I thought of these regions, evangelised in the past by intrepid missionaries but still suffering a lack of priests. And I watched my confreres, dancing and singing their way through the entire Christmas repertory of our monastery. There were just twelve of us, like the apostles. If those first twelve men, of whom we are merely the ambitious and imperfect imitators, succeeded in evangelising Galilee, Judaea, Samaria and then Asia and even as far as Greece and Italy, then surely we can at least manage to evangelise our little local area in Bangui, and the local prefectures of Ombella M'Poko, Nana-Mamberé, Ouham-Pendé and maybe even Lobaye and Sangha-Mbaéré as well? After Mass we went to see the sub-prefect by way of a courtesy visit. We discovered that Bambio had been founded in the 1920s to house the plantation workers on the rubber plantations, the source of the rubber for the soles of the French soldiers'

boots during the Second World War. Then we travelled to Mambelé – a journey of around 25 miles (40 km) and lined all the way by giant trees – to visit one of the biggest sawmills in the country. The manager welcomed us warmly and explained to us every stage of this, one of the few still flourishing economic activities in the Central African Republic and a source of work for hundreds of people. And we were proud to discover that the timber from this forest is among the best in the world, being sold to the United States, China, Germany, France and Italy. It may even be that the furniture in your home is made from hardwood from this area.

Finally, the time came to say goodbye to Bambio, even though we would have been happy to stay there a few days longer. And of course, in the best African tradition, the guests cannot leave empty-handed. So three new passengers were added to our company: a monkey (captured by Brother Regis' elder brother and already cooked, according to ancestral methods), a fine little piglet and a kid (not yet roasted, but not likely to see many days of 2018). And then some leaves of *gnetum africanum* – a sort of vegetable that looks almost like an ingredient for a magic potion – and a healthy supply of peké, a traditional drink that will guarantee the quiet inebriation of my confreres. On the return journey we spent a night in the parish of Boda, a former

mission of the Spiritan Fathers, now run by the Comboni missionaries. The parish church is a gem, built in the tropical colonial neo-Romanesque style. This town, which is rich in diamonds, was the scene of bloody fighting between Christians and Muslims during the war. Now however the Christians and Muslims are once more living peacefully side by side. The following day we made a brief visit to the waterfalls and then set out once more for Bangui. We ate lunch among the trees in front of the cathedral of M’Baïki, one of the most beautiful churches in Central Africa, and probably the work of the same architect as in Boda.

As we travelled along, I endeavoured to capture something of the animated discussions of my confreres in the Sango language... Timber, coffee, gold, diamonds... The riches of Central Africa... Bozizé, Djotodia, Touaderà, Seleka, Antibalaká – all the problems of the Central African

Republic... Then Real Madrid, Barcelona, Liverpool, Paris St. Germain – the lighter side of Central Africa. Finally, the singing of Vespers uniting all the passions and thoughts, burdens and desires of this monastic community on four wheels. Then they all fall asleep and I think of their dreams – as large as the forest trees.

Back home again, a few days later, Brother Grâce-à-Dieu comes to thank me for the beautiful outing, which enabled him to get to know parts of his country he had never seen before. And then he assures me: “The Christians of Bambio, who were so happy with their belated Christmas celebration, have made me more determined than ever to become a priest.” The tree of Brother Grâce-à-Dieu has put down good roots. And God willing, his dream will indeed come true.

*Love and blessings  
Padre Federico Trincherio, ocd*



## OCDS Provincial meeting in Bari and Maddaloni

The OCDS Communities of the Naples Province held two Provincial meetings in Bari (27-28 January) and in Maddaloni (3-4 February). They discussed their Constitutions under the headings: “Divine Call, Life-Long Commitment and Continuing Fidelity to our Charism”. Fr. Alzinir Debastiani, General Delegate for the OCDS, facilitated both meetings. Having heard the suggestions of the Secular Order members, he invited the Provincial Council to take note of all these observations in the preparation of the next Provincial Statute. The Acts of the Assembly will be

### Review of constitutions. Italian OCD meeting

A meeting of OCD Friars of the Italian Circumscriptions took place from 19 to 21 February in the “Santa Maria Annunziata” Spirituality Centre in Maddaloni of the Neapolitan Province. It was organized by the OCD Major Superiors of the Italian Conference (CISM-OCD). We had made earlier references to this meeting in our social webs.

The purpose of the meeting was to share the deliberations of the various Italian Circumscriptions on their review of our Constitutions, as well as learning how the process was de-

veloping in other geographic regions and what were its prospects for the future. Four Provincials attended the meeting while Fr. Emilio Martinez, Secretary of the International Commission set up by the Definitory to assist in the Order’s review of our laws, acted as Moderator of proceedings.

published in a special volume being compiled by the Provincial President, Rosanna Sabatillo. Fr. Alzinir commented on various themes relating to the OCDS Constitutions: their juridical significance and charismatic relevance for lay people’s lives, under the inspiration of St. Teresa. He also emphasized the vital role of community for a genuine experience of the divine call to the Secular Teresian Carmel.

As well as Fr. Alzinir, the OCD Provincial of Naples, Fr. Luigi Borriello, Fr. Andrew l’Afflitto and other Community assistants were also present at the meetings.

A further meeting, with the same programme, is scheduled to take place in April at the OCD monastery of Bocca di Magra (Genovese Province). This will allow another group of Friars to attend.