

## Generalate News & our Encounter with Corona

We are living with the greatest challenge of our times – a tiny insignificant organism has taken over our world! As it continues to spread rapidly around the world and nations are struggling to slow down its transmission, its impact on society and global environment keep us on crossroads. Facing these challenges in faith and hope, life in the Generalate remained sound and vibrant. (except for the last couple of weeks - see the last page). We give you some glimpses of it!

- ❖ Thanks to God’s strengthening presence and protection and the prayerful support of the SCJM family all over the world, all of us in the community are relatively healthy and fit. Our immunity system is maintained by our own local ‘doctors’ whose natural remedies, prepared with much love and care, see no parallels! Nevertheless, those who unwittingly came in contact with positive cases chose to self-isolate as a caring and precautionary measure. A bit of a purgatory experience!
- ❖ As with the rest of the world, the pandemic has brought the virtual world far closer to us. Virtual retreats, virtual masses, prayer services and meetings, webinars, etc. have energised us remarkably during this period of confinement. To mention a few,

- The General Council members made use of the opportunity to attend a number very relevant webinars organised by UISG/USG, Faith and Praxis, SEDOS, etc. - all based in Rome.
- Our whole community participated in the virtual sessions and prayer services during the Laudato Si Week and Season of Creation, initiated and organised by Global Catholic Climate Movement.
- The webinar on Fratelli Tutti, hosted from Rome, took us on a very spirited journey into this rich encyclical as several eminent men and women shared their thoughts and reflections, challenging us to conversion and action.

- ❖ Occasions of celebrations were many: birthdays, feast days, national days, congregational feasts, elections & formation governments in countries closer to us, cultural feasts... While the tone of these feasts remained simple and modest, these were animated days of fun and joy. On national



feast days, besides having a meaningful prayer service for the country celebrated and some national food items, this celebration also brought us together in the evening for a cultural exchange: highlighting certain lived aspects of the country, the values and ideals the country stands for, some cultural expressions like dance and singing, a video, etc. all of which enrich us mutually in our inter-cultural and inter-national setting.

- ❖ Being confined to Brussels the General Government, besides attending to the regular and ordinary needs of the Congregation, keeps searching for ways of facing this challenge proactively. Thanks

to the facilities offered by technology, several on-line facilities are ‘domesticated’ and put to use to remain connected with every unit of the Congregation. As there are no promising signs for travelling yet, the need to find alternate ways for organising congregational events is becoming more real and necessary.

- ❖ Despite our errant behaviours, God continues with God’s boundless gifts through nature. Autumn, the “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”! The community of the Generalate celebrated this fruitfulness with much joy and gratitude! The fruit trees of Beau Vallon, laden with fruits, were a great attraction: cherries, pears and apples! We were happy to get an invitation from the community of Ave Maria. The enthusiasm to go, meet our sisters, and collect some of those fruits was very high. Equally high-spirited were we to transform them into various forms: apple compote, cake & pie, cherry jam, pear stew - you name it! This is not to speak of their daily abundance at table! We were also able to share this abundance with our collaborators and neighbouring religious communities. There were many a fun-filled moments too, as you can imagine!



- ❖ Stranded students found a home away from home with us: Sr. Beatrice Tshilemba of Province St. Vincent de Paul who has been following a Formators’ Training Program in France stayed with us for over a month. Similarly, Fr. Ruwan Prasad of Sri Lanka, on conclusion of his study here in Belgium needed a ‘home’ till he could find the means to get back to his country. Their presence added much joy and wealth to our life of confinement. Thanks to a short respite before the second wave of the virus overwhelmed the country, they were able to get a flight back home.



- ❖ The confinement period also saw a greater commitment to care of our Common Home and heightened activity in nurturing plants, both inside and outside of the house. The offices and rooms of the Generalate have gone greener and the potted plants get better care and attention. In the evenings, especially during hotter days, one would find some very enthusiastic ‘gardeners’ out there, watering plants, cutting and pruning them, planting new ones, and engaged in some intimate conversation with some of them. We even have a small vegetable garden at the far end of the property!
- ❖ It was a welcome news for us when Bro. Hyppolyte Manirakiza of the Brothers of Charity called to say that he would like to visit us. Ever since his appointment as the provincial of Europe, he wanted to meet the Sisters of Charity at the Generalate but had not been able to do so because of the pandemic situation. Finally, when the restrictions were somewhat relaxed, he came along with Bro. Jos Mathijssen, the former vicar general of the congregation. We had a very warm and cordial afternoon together, which no doubt strengthened the bond between the siblings.
- ❖ It is more than fifty years since our Generalate has moved in to the present building; however, the building is much older. Hence, we now are noticing some ‘ageing problems’! Concealed wiring

and underground pipelines begin to show signs of wear and tear! Repair works are likely to be a major preoccupation for some time, now.

- ❖ **LATE NEWS:** Corona was not too comfortable, apparently, without paying a visit to the community of the Generalate! She began showing indications of her presence with us around the first week of this month. At first, we ignored her which she did not certainly approve; instead insisted on getting the attention she demanded!

Our family doctor advised us to go for a test as a precautionary measure and, to our surprise, most of us came out positive. Fortunately, thanks to the prayers of so many, both within the Congregation and beyond it, and also perhaps because of the power of the herbal medicines we were taking, the symptoms were mild: cold, cough, low fever, body ache, lack of appetite, loss of smell and taste and, of course, loss of energy.

As this makes its way to you, practically all of them report getting better by the day and almost ready to get back to some kind of normalcy. The stage of contagion is nearing its end. However, the doctor's advice is that all precautionary measures continued.

As soon as it was confirmed that we are in the grip of Corona, the provincials of our Belgium provinces were quick to respond; they were extremely sensitive and helpful, offering all possible help. This, they got shopping done, provided us with frozen meals and disposable items and whatever else we were in need of. Just make a call – things were at our door-step! Words are too insufficient a medium to thank them for their prompt and timely help!

Thanks to each one of you too for your concern and prayerful support through messages, emails, cards, phone calls, etc.

So, with care, concern, solidarity and, of course, prayer – we are overcoming the virus! Corona has already got the message that her place is not with us!

*This pandemic has given us a chance to develop new ways of living. It offers us an opportunity to engage in cultivating values, connections, and life-giving activities. (Pope Francis)*



**Wish you a very Meaningful & Fervent Advent!**

*During Advent, “we are called to enlarge the horizons of our hearts, to be surprised by the life that is presented each day with its newness. In order to do this we need to learn to not depend on our own securities, our own established plans, because the Lord comes in the hour which we don’t imagine.” Pope Francis*