



Press Release

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

Les Montsvoirs, Monastery of Notre-Dame de la Gloire-Dieu,

The General Chapter of the Monastic sisters of Bethlehem, of the Assumption of the Virgin, and of Saint Bruno brought together 68 prioresses and delegates from 28 monasteries in Europe, North and South America and the Holy Land.

The General Chapter took place from September 12 to October 11, 2024, in the presence of two Apostolic Assistants: Father Jean Quris, priest of the Diocese of Angers, and Mother Geneviève Barrière o.s.b.

Election of a new Prioress General for the monastic sisters of Bethlehem

Having reached the age of 75, Sister Emmanuel has resigned her office. During her seven years as prioress, a loyal and frank collaboration with the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (D.I.V.C.S.V.A.) and the Apostolic Assistants has been her priority, helping to bring peace and build the future of the sisters' community. It is with great gratitude that all the sisters thank Sister Emmanuel.

From now on, Sister Laure-Marie, elected for a six-year term by the members of the Chapter, will be responsible for the authority of the monastic sisters of Bethlehem. She will work with a permanent Council of six sisters:

Sister Paola (1st assistant) from Switzerland; Sister Liesse-Myriam (2nd assistant) from France; Sister Birgit from Austria; Sister Gratienne from France; Sister Mayté from the Philippines; Sister Mia from Belgium.

A General Chapter structured around three themes

The service of authority

Since the last General Chapter in 2021, following the directives given by the Dicastery, and then following the recommendations of the "cell of listening", the monastic sisters continued their journey, with the help of outside contributors, to learn how to exercise authority with greater collegiality. Numerous training sessions in the monasteries have helped to gradually establish a more effective articulation of the various governing bodies: prioress and vicars, council and community chapter. This has helped each sister to learn to participate freely and actively in community reflections and decisions. A preparatory document handed out to the perpetually professed sisters enabled each community to measure the progress made, identify areas for further development and thus initiate the work of the Chapter.

During the Chapter, Archbishop Jean-Paul Vesco o.p., Archbishop of Algiers, Cardinal François Bustillo O.F.M. Conv, Bishop of Ajaccio, Bishop Yves Le Saux, Bishop of Annecy, and Brother Sabino Chialà, Prior General of the Bose community in Italy, spoke successively to share their experience of governance and their reflections on the Church's current synodal momentum. Béatrix Breaté, founder of the Talenthéo Institute, led a practical training session on tools for responsible and collegial governance.

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Deepening the charism of the Monastic Family

"Conversations in the Spirit" in small groups, exchanges in plenary assemblies, and the sharing of testimonies enabled the following deepening:

- an objective rereading of certain stages in the history of the Monastic Family, with a view to transparency and the search for truth, particularly with regard to its foundress, Sister Marie.
- a reflection on the authenticity and challenges of solitary monastic life, as lived out in the monasteries.

Encounters with our brother monks brought out the many convergences in the deepening of our call to the desert. Another highlight was a day spent together with our lay brothers and sisters, in a rich experience of communion.

Further work on the Constitutions

From June 2022 onwards, we reworked our Constitutions according to the points requested by the (D.I.V.C.S.V.A.), with the aim of lightening and synthesizing them. This new text was voted by the sisters by two-thirds majority, in accordance with Church canon law. It will be submitted to the same Dicastery in the coming weeks.

Looking ahead to the next General Chapter

This General Chapter also marks an evolution with the effective end of the mission of Mother Geneviève Barrière, Apostolic Assistant. Father Jean Quris' mandate will come to an end in a year's time. We have decided to call on Mother Scholastique Piaget, abbess emeritus of Pradines Abbey, to continue accompanying us.

The objectifying of the charism of our monastic family will continue with the help of competent outsiders, enabling a scientific study of the foundation's history. Concrete decisions concerning, in particular, the accompaniment of our older sisters, the management and development of our artwork and the challenge of building maintenance will be implemented in the communities, with the professional help of the lay members of the Association des Corbières (A.S.C.). We remain vigilant to continue our journey of conversion and to give an important place to ongoing formation in various fields: personal accompaniment, formation in the service of authority, theological and anthropological training.

Sister Laure-Marie says: "This General Chapter has given us a new and strong spiritual impetus, which will nourish our hopes for the coming years. We entrust our journey to the Mercy of God, to the Virgin Mary and to our father Saint Bruno.

"Have the same disposition, the same love, the same feelings; seek unity." Phil 2:2

The dramatic events in the Holy Land and Lebanon have been the focus of our intercession and compassion throughout this chapter.

Today, the Monastic Family of Bethlehem, of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and of Saint Bruno counts 496 sisters and 34 brothers living their vocation in 31 monasteries: 22 in Europe (including 14 in France), 5 in North and South America, and 4 in the Holy Land.

As part of the monastic tradition of East and West, the Bethlehem Monastic Family, an Institute of Pontifical Right, participates in its humble place in the movement of the Spirit which urges Christians of various confessions towards full communion in Christ.

For further information, visit www.bethleem.org

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