

# NEWSLETTER GENERAL EXECUTIVE

## CONGREGATION OF THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

Number 63, December 2020

### 190 YEARS BROTHERS OF GOOD WORKS/BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

On May 28, 1825, Glorieux was ordained to the priesthood in Mechelen (Belgium). His motto: "He has sent me to preach the joyful message to the poor, and to announce to prisoners their liberation." He wants to be for the people to whom he will be sent.

On June 24, 1825, Glorieux receives his appointment-letter for Ronse. On June 27, 1825, he starts with his work in Ronse. There are two large problems in Ronse: the terrible ignorance about everything, and the aggressive begging.

In 1829, the ordination of Mgr. Van de Velde to the status of bishop, a socially-conscious man, takes place.

Glorieux already has started some activities to deal with the ignorance and the begging. The old Saint Peter's church becomes available in 1830, as a place to start a charitable work house.

Children who earlier roamed around in Ronse and area, now received catechism lessons, plus lessons in spinning and weaving. They learned how to use flax to make rags, sacks and clothing. Drifters find a place for sleeping in the larger part of the church, and Glorieux goes begging for food. This goes together with a wholesome soup.

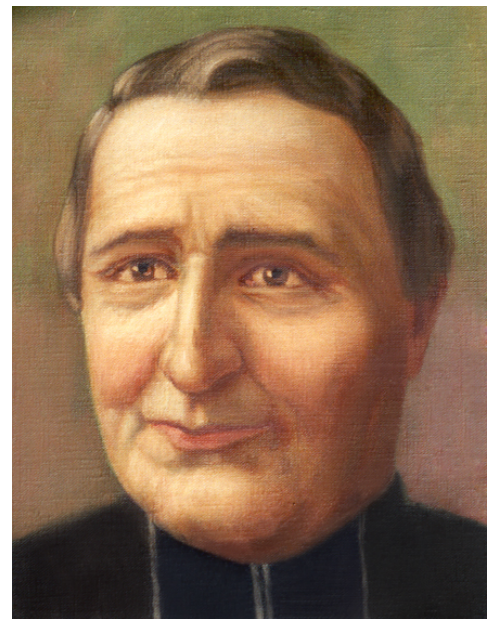
These activities require enthused and selfless co-workers, and that is why Glorieux on September 20, 1830, in a letter to the bishop, asks permission to start a Religious Institute of Charity. This could be realized by an already existing congregation. But no congregations appear to be available to take this on. On November 25, 1830, Mgr. Van de Velde tells Glorieux to start experimenting with a few virtuous young men on the one hand, and some young women on the other hand, but avoiding the appearance of a religious congregation.

Within this assignment one can find the origin of two congregations. Only in 1832 did the brothers receive a name, but the sisters had to wait for a long time. The bishop writes to Glorieux, "You will call them Brothers of Good Works!"

In the meantime, Glorieux is working on a rule, which, with the help of, among others, father Van De Kerckhove S.J., and the example of the rule of the Brothers of Christian Schools, came about. On July 17, 1835, the bishop approved the rule, and on August 19 of that same year the first 6 Brothers Of Good Works received their soutane; on August 20, they made their first vows.

The founding of the Sisters wasn't so easy. Only until October 30, 1845, did the successor of Mgr. Van de Velde accept the first 8 candidates as novices in the congregation, which received the name of Sisters of Mercy. On October 30, 2020, the congregation therefore celebrates its 175th anniversary. We congratulated the Sisters heartily for this important event.

Our congregation grew relatively quickly in the beginning. Sometimes too quickly. There wasn't always enough time for education and formation, while many new activities were accepted. Unfortunately, things sometimes didn't go well, which also happened throughout the years of the congregation's history. It's good that we recognize this and express our *mea culpa*, because those who needed our help, didn't get it.



Glorieux: he was a father to the poor.

In 1888 the headquarters of the congregation was moved from Ronse to Oostakker, and the name of Brothers of Good Works was changed to Brothers of Our lady of Lourdes. Our charisma is better expressed in the original name. If you would check the book “175 Years of Good Works”, you will see that the congregation never limited its good works to just one kind of good work. We see that Glorieux already in the first rule stressed to look for local needs, and these were and are quite varied. With thanks to Glorieux, the congregation is still open to the Spirit who blows where it wills, and who asks to be open to new needs. The congregation had to free itself from clericalism. This happened in 1892 when the congregation received its papal status, and therefore no longer depended on the spiritual fathers and the bishop. Since that time, the congregation could stand on its own. But good cooperation with the local bishop and the leaders of the local church, as well as mutual respect, are necessary.

After a short time, the congregation crossed the border, and found itself in The Netherlands. There are also various attempts to go to the United States, but that didn't work out. In 1910, Belgium and The Netherlands become provinces of their own, and from these provinces successive brothers go to Indonesia, Congo, Curacao, and Canada. This was during the period when the congregation was the strongest numerically with more than 900 members.

The Second Vatican Council generates a lot of renewal, also for religious, but simultaneously a lot of unrest and uncertainty. Our congregation was not an exception to this. In western countries there is an almost abrupt slowdown in new vocations.



The Pope has chosen his name in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi, who was an apostle to the poor.

Yet, there were initiatives for new works, and brothers went to Austria, Spain, Brazil and Ethiopia. But to take on pioneering works, some existing works had to be phased out, and we also notice that the congregation had to withdraw gradually from a number of countries. This is often a painful process, especially for those brothers who have adopted their new country as their new homeland, and who feel, upon their return, as strangers in their country of birth.

The church has had a lot of difficulty in standing up for the poor and the oppressed. During Glorieux's lifetime, not a single social encyclical had been published. This doesn't mean that there wasn't attention paid to social issues at all. We can recall those charismatic figures like Saint Francis, Saint Vincent, La Salle, Canon Triest in Belgium, our own

Founder Glorieux, Don Bosco, and many other Founders of active congregations in the 19th and twentieth centuries.

The Pope calls for the brotherhood of all people of good will, and for making the care for the poor the center of our attention. This agrees with what Saint Vincent already said several centuries ago, “The reforms of the Church (after the Council of Trent) are useless if the poor don't profit from them.” Growth in merciful love, means to want to be more and more a brother of good works.

We don't know what the future has in store for us. We can't pretend that there aren't worries about the future. Let's individually and as a congregation contribute to the future of the earth, and to the future of young people.

But don't let this be a reason to overlook the present. Together with others – people of good will, as brothers and sisters of one another – we build in the present for the future. Everyone does that while grounded in his own vocation. Do respect the vocation of someone else, and deepen your own vocation. Perhaps, we can inspire other to get moving. That would be quite nice, but if it are the others who inspire us, that would be good as well. But do something!

*Br. Ton Houdé*

## CALENDAR OF BIRTHDAYS 2021

Every year, a calendar of birthdays is made up for internal use. For this year's calendar, the general executive has asked for the artistic talent of brother John de Britto Rismario (Indonesia), who has designed a drawing for each month of the year. Each drawing has been carefully edited for use on the calendar. On the image alongside, one can see how Glorieux receives as a gift the best milk cow, called Lize, from the stable.

*Glorieux wanted milk for the orphans. His father gave him his cow. This is the option for the poor!*



## CORONA VIRUS AND THE CONGREGATION

After a relatively quiet summer, the situation in Belgium and The Netherlands has quickly deteriorated: during the fall, the number of infections has steeply increased. The medical and scientific establishment rang the alarm bell, and the authorities – having learned from the first corona wave – have taken measures to deal with the second wave. The successive announcements from the pharmaceutical establishment that effective vaccines had been manufactured, caused a worldwide wave of relief. The result of the presidential election in the USA will most likely also have contributed to this.

In the daily lives of the brothers in Oostakker, nothing much is happening for the time being: staying inside is the rule, moving around requires the use of a mouth cap, receiving visitors is subjected to strict rules. The brothers in Depoorter in Eindhoven have a bit more freedom, but there, too, the opportunities for going outside are rather limited.

In Indonesia, almost 520,000 cases of positive infections have been identified up till now, and more than 16,300 deaths have officially been counted. A task force has been established under the BNPB (National Disaster Mitigation Agency), with the purpose of coordinating the work of the central and regional

authorities, together with the army, the police, social agencies and universities. Since September 15<sup>th</sup>, the stricter rules in Jakarta have been re-introduced. A less strict rule was allowed where possible, although it was stressed that occasions for contacts are to be minimized as much as possible. The brothers have the celebrations concerning the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the congregation on November 25, made possible with the necessary ingenuity: the solemn Eucharistic celebration was broadcast via a digital channel. Brazil is one of countries that has been most severely hit by the virus, with more than 170,000 deaths. Also, our own social center in Betim remains closed. At the moment, a few more things are allowed, for instance having to do with courses and psychological guidance.



Everywhere in the world, caregivers receive many expressions of support. For instance in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), where during the night a caregiver is projected onto the statue of Christ the Redeemer.

None of the brothers has been infected by the virus, which is also true for the brothers in Jordânia: the brothers and the elderly in Lar Glorieux have been safe until now.

For some time, the African continent has been spared for the corona pandemic, but recently, it is in turn also experiencing the effects of the spread on Covid-19. The brothers have informed us that in the

Counseling Center a few infections have been noticed. In the house of formation, several brothers have been rather sick, but luckily not because of the corona virus. The (spiritual) healthcare in the projects is continued, but in a modified manner in view of the safety regulations.

Brother Franklin Clemencia, whose home is in Curacao, reports that there is an increase in the number of infections, resulting in stricter rules.

Spain is hit very hard, and counts already 44,000 deaths.

For comparison:

	<b>infections</b>	<b>deaths</b>
<b>Brazil</b>	6.200.000	171.500
<b>Spain</b>	1.600.000	44.500
<b>Belgium</b>	57.000	16.200
<b>Netherlands</b>	30.000	9.250
<b>Indonesia</b>	520.000	16.300
<b>Ethiopia</b>	108.000	1.700

The digital developments during the recent decennia have created many ways of communication between people. For instance, the 94<sup>th</sup> meeting of general superiors (November 26-28), usually in Rome, is an online affair this time

*Br. Ton Houdé*

## WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

Only those who seek and who question, and  
by doing as such put their own prejudice aside  
find a king laying in the cradle.  
Let us – like them – worship this king  
en go home following a different path.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2021**

Salvador Dalí: the Magi.



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