

NEWSLETTER GENERAL EXECUTIVE

CONGREGATION OF THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

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BRAZIL: FESTA JUNINA IN JORDÂNIA



On July 13, the residents and the care team threw a party in Lar Glorieux, the house in Jordânia where mainly elderly people in need of care live. The feast that is celebrated is the so-called June festival (Festa Junina) which is celebrated throughout Brazil in the month of June or July.

Bro. Heládio Firmino Rodrigues

BROTHER ERIC CLAEYS

Brother Eric Claeys (°1943) has been in Belgium since Saturday evening, July 6. He is the last brother of our Congregation still working in the Congo. During his visit to the general house in Oostakker we spoke with him.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN CONGO?

Eric went to Congo for the first time in 1968 and has lived and worked in various locations since then. These are places that sound familiar because they were/are often (negatively) in the news: Kalemie, Lubumbashi,

WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

The east of Congo has been restless for many years and there still seems to be no improvement on the horizon. Eric is saddened by the fact that a large part of the population is having a very difficult time and

lives in precarious constructions that can easily collapse at the slightest natural disaster. The roads are poorly maintained and can hardly be used in the rainy season. You have to see the misery with your own eyes to realize how great the need is.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN BUKAVU?

A bishop pointed out to him that there was a demand for skilled personnel for the technical school at Bukavu. The Marists, who were initially in charge, had handed over the management to the diocese, which in turn passed the torch to the Brothers of Charity. This gave the school a new beginning. At that time, this congregation was already in charge of a psychiatric center in the area. Bro. Eric was more than welcome because of his experience as a teacher in technical education. He had previously taught as a mechanics teacher, even though he is trained ... as an electrician. Since 1995 to this day, he has been a valued employee in the *garage department*, where he trains students in automotive engineering. In this regard, he also gives several hours of electronics. After all, the car nowadays is much more than shifting gears and is becoming more and more complicated, isn't it!? The school has about 800 students.

DO YOU LIVE WITH THE BROTHERS OF CHARITY?

Brother Eric lives with the Brothers of Charity in Bukavu. Together they form a community of ten brothers: two from Belgium, two from the Central African Republic, and six Congolese brothers. Eric and three other brothers work at the school, the other six are active in the psychiatric hospital of the Brothers of Charity, a work of charity in which this Congregation has specialized and is active worldwide.

WHAT IS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION?

He humbly admits that the socio-economic situation is very bad. Those with a technical education still have a relatively easy chance of finding work. For many people who have completed higher education, the situation is dramatic: for newly graduated doctors, economists, etc. strangely enough, there is often no work! These people are forced to move away. Some are going to try their luck in South Africa, others hope to find work in Europe in one way or another.

WE REGULARLY RECEIVE REPORTS OF VIOLENCE. DO YOU FEEL SAFE IN BUKAVU?

In fact, there is no safety. People live in great uncertainty. Burglaries can occur, armed robberies are commonplace. After 7 p.m., when it's dark, it's best not to venture outside. The brothers are fortunate enough to be able to entrench themselves in relatively sturdy buildings. For the population, on the other hand, this is not the case: they live in constant fear. The civil war is and remains latent in the region and it flares up sporadically in all its intensity. When armed militias cross the border, you can be sure that a trail of destruction and misery will be drawn. Fortunately, Bukavu itself is not the most dangerous area.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO END THIS CONVERSATION?

Brother Eric wants to end the conversation on a positive and grateful note. He has been able to work there, and he hopes to be able to continue doing so for a while. The people appreciate what he (and others) is doing and they have embraced him as well. They are happy with the school and the presence of the religious. Of course, a close bond has been developed with the parish and the church. The technical institute and the psychiatric hospital are important for the region.



Bro. Eric and Bro. Ton (Generalate).

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR JULY AND AUGUST? AND AFTER THAT?

If you have many years on your odometer, you have to a full check-up every so often, he says. Brother Eric has a series of appointments with doctors noted in his agenda. Of course, he also wants to take the opportunity to visit family and friends and enjoy the holidays.

Epilogue. Brother Eric is currently recovering from a medical treatment he underwent in August. For the time being, he will stay in Belgium to recover, for which he will come to Zorgcampus Glorieux in Oostakker. Together with him, we hope that everything goes well and that he will be able to pick up where he left off in the foreseeable future.

INDONESIA

During three weeks of the month of August, the general executive was fully present in Indonesia. To this end, brothers Franklin Clemencia and Ton Houdé had travelled to Indonesia. The other members of the general executive live there permanently.

In the first and last week that were spent on Java – especially Jakarta – the necessary meetings took place, including discussions about the sending of Indonesian brothers to Brazil and Europe, the plans for the new building of the brotherhouse in Desa Putera and the construction of the first brotherhouse on Kalimantan in or near the future capital of Indonesia, financial affairs, the formation of the brothers, the pastoral care of vocations and the climate of regeneration.

The second week was used to visit the four communities in Sumatra. The last visit of the Superior General to Sumatra dates back to before the corona outbreak. The Yayasan (foundation) of the Congregational schools, boarding schools and two clinics has made many thorough improvements to the buildings. The new construction of the brotherhouse in Pematang Siantar is almost finished. The new building also gives space to the school association to hold meetings (with overnight accommodation) with the heads of the schools or committees with special tasks.



Brothers Herman, Ton and Franciscus amidst a cheering crowd.

In Pangururan on the island of Samosir in Lake Toba, the boarding school had been thoroughly renovated. Because of the great distances to the villages, many boarding schools are needed.

In the most remote community called Tumba Jae, a large multifunctional hall had been realized that is used by the schools, the boarding school and the village. The junior high school there had been renovated. The journey to Tumba Jae was quite a task for Brother Herman Jozef, our driver, who is also secretary of the school association and deputy superior general.



In addition to the four communities of three brothers each, we visited eight schools. Everywhere we went, we were more than warmly welcomed by the students, the staff and the managements. Such a reception is accompanied by singing, readings, enthusiastically shaking hands and handing out autographs, taking group photos and many photos with spontaneously formed groups and individual students or teachers.

Individual interviews were held with the brothers.

On the return trip from Tumba Jae and Panguruan we took the ferry across Lake Toba. Lake Toba is one of the largest lakes in the world. It has a depth of about 400 m and is an important tourist attraction. If you

suddenly see a lot of monkeys, you know you're close to Lake Toba. On Samosir you will also come across many typical Batak houses. Some churches are even built entirely in Batak style. The communities of the brothers in Sumatra are all located in the Batak regions. There are a number of Batak languages, there is the already mentioned Batak architectural style and traditional costumes and Batak dances.



On the last day of August, the silver feast of the profession of brothers Christofer (l.) and Gerard (r.) was celebrated in the community of Desa Putera (which means Boys Town). Also here a lot of enthusiasm, singing and dancing and a beautiful Eucharist with singing by the choir. A fitting end to a beautiful and meaningful visit. Thanks to all the brothers.

Our farewell almost coincided with the arrival of Pope Francis. In view of the more than warm welcome we received, we can imagine what it must have been like during the Pope's visit.

Bro. Ton Houdé

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