

## Lay & Religious Assumptionists AN ALLIANCE.

The history of collaboration between Assumptionist religious and lay people who work with them in common enterprises, and/or who want to share all or part of Assumptionist spirituality is a very long one! A history affected by events in different epochs and changes in mentality. Since the last General & Provincial Chapters this collaboration seeks to express itself in the form of an "alliance".



This journey from "collaboration" to an "Alliance" is not just a matter of vocabulary. It is a movement that leads lay people and religious to better appreciate the source that inspires them to work in common and diverse missions. What is already being lived here or there is alive and growing. On all sides, men and women embark on an adventure that is full of risks, in fidelity to the spirit of the Assumption. Besides the annual retreat and the pilgrimage on the footsteps of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon, every two years, a cycle of formation over three years that began in November 2006, (two sessions of two days each per year) takes place. The themes include: the spirit of the Assumption, the particular Charism of the institute, its history, and Saint Augustine. 45 people, friends of the Assumption started this journey. "Your Kingdom Come", a new collection of pamphlets, simple, short, beautiful presented and richly spiritual have been written. The first, «Discover the spirituality of the Augustinians of the Assumption», outlines the spiritual path that we follow and provides material for small group reading, reflection and prayer with a local community. The association of "Friends of the Augustinians of the Assumption" offers other meetings as well. But the alliance is also being lived elsewhere giving rise to " An International Assumptionist Solidarity Group", a group of lay people who seek to help Assumptionist communities in the Province, outside France, to meet, to listen, to help them formulate their needs and offer helpful tools to respond to these needs. There is also a group of "Lay Assumptionist Volunteers" that seeks to encourage the commitment of lay collaborators, young and adult, for a fixed period of time to help in one of our projects linked with a community. Other links include the "Justice and peace" commission to promote initiatives and action among the poor: presence on the boat "Je sers", a place of welcome and support, a group in Valpré that has created links with Tunisia, Salvador and Romania, pilgrimages to Lourdes for people with few resources, in partnership with the Lourdes Hotels, «a holiday in the Chateau» for families who cannot afford to go away. These are some of the elements of a real diaconia to which lay Assumptionists have committed themselves. In November 2007, a forum or gathering of lay people and religious will take place for those who are already committed and for those who want to learn more or want to be more committed. It will be a time of reflection and information about the Lay Assumption and what it hopes to become. All that is needed is a desire to know this source that inspires men and women today and from which some drink and some are inspired to serve.

Noel le Bousse a.a.

## In two Words - Lay Religious

The word layman comes from Greek «laos», a rare term in classic Greek it is used to designate the unorganized mass of people (the "populace"). Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible use it to designate the "People of God", rather than "demos" (the group of citizens, which has a much more political dimension) or "ethnos" (that designates the non-Jewish nations). In the Bible, «laos» has a double meaning: the whole People of God, but also those who, in this people, are neither priests, prophets nor kings and who do not have a specific sacred function. This is the word that passed into Christian vocabulary and it is in this sense that, at the end of the 1st century, Clement of Rome uses the word «laikos» to designate those who belong to God's People who are not priests. Rarely used until the III century, «laikos» became laicus in Latin, then laity in English, to designate those, in the Church, who are not clerics. The term "lay-religious": the term lay is used to designate those who walk spiritually with religious men and Sisters but are not vowed to the Rule of life. One readily notes the ambiguity of this use however since, in the religious life, the sisters and brothers, who are not priests or deacons, are, in the strict sense of the term, lay people. One will finally distinguish "The Laity" from the secular use of the word «secular»: this word appeared at the end of the Second Empire and was used in 1871 by Littré to designate the separation between Church and State and gave rise to the term secularism.

Nicolas Senèz

## A Lay Religious Alliance

**.... a sign of the love of Christ !**

In the past, religious life was often perceived as a flight from the world. You may remember homilies affirming that Martha was in the wrong. Only Mary was praised for her desire for contemplation and her freedom from material worries... (Luc 10: 38-42).

Fortunately, the last Church Council restored the Church to the heart of the world. The coming of God's Kingdom summarises Christ's teaching. And he wants his disciples to help establish this Kingdom. Together, both lay and religious, we are the sign that Christ is still at work. We are the witnesses and actors of his love for everyone. In the Holy Spirit, we are the Church: the sacrament of God.

The sacrament does not place God's presence up in heaven. He makes it visible and present in concrete reality. God's great joy is that we share in the gifts of his grace. Through us, God is joined to the lives of the men and the women of our world. We wish to announce Christ where people do not see him, where there is no more hope.

A couple do not only speak of love. They make it visible every day in small gestures. They come together after their day's work. They share their joys and sorrows. They know how to renew their promise of fidelity. The alliance between the laity and religious is something like this. We want to make Christ's love live in us, between us and around us. At work, in our families or in our communities, Christ calls us to prepare the ground for his kingdom. If our links are being strengthened today, we have a common future.



*"An alliance is a family in which each person is irreplaceable."*

Just as the Eucharist transforms the bread into the body and blood of Christ, our lives seek to be open to the Risen Lord who forms our communities. The spiritual life is not the adventure of a hermit. Our yes to God is unique but it is always a "yes" decision that is made with others and for others. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them." (Mt. 18, 20).

Of course the kingdom of God will be incomplete this side of history. We won't make it happen just through our human projects. But we will belong to the Christ who already anticipates a kingdom of justice and peace for us. We make his prayer our own: Father, your Kingdom come. While working for the kingdom, it is Christ that our communities await.

Since Abraham, we know that God is always there for us. In acknowledging this Alliance, we hope to remain faithful and united. Lay and religious Assumptionists, we are the Church: the assembly that is conscious of God's presence. What a gift!

This is why religious and laity wish to make an Alliance today. They want to make the Church live so that Christ's presence is at the heart of the world. The Alliance announces something great beyond comprehension: a life of communion with God. The Alliance is a family where each person is irreplaceable with a happiness that we have certainly already tasted and cannot be taken from us.

Vincent Leclercq a.a.

## The Original Intuition of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon

Emmanuel d'Alzon had considered different forms of involvement of the laity in "*the Assumptionist Order*". The Church encourages us to return to the path set out for us in the early days of our existence!

Jean-Michel Brochec a.a.

Ever since the beginning, the founder of the Assumptionists had conceived a Congregation integrated with the laity. The Constitutions of 1855 defined the first Assumption not as a clerical community, but as an Association of priests and laity. From the beginning, there were religious who were not called to the priesthood therefore but also, (what was original), secular lay brothers, called Brothers of the third order.

### Men and women tertiaries

The first two professed were two professors, Jules Monnier (1815-1856) and Eugene Germer-Durand (1812-1880), who, giving up their elevated professional posts, joined Father d'Alzon at the College of the Assumption and worked on the project with him. Not living in community, they were able "to make themselves available, under the direction of the Order, for works of charity and the apostolate". They had a novitiate designed specifically for them, with their own rules including regular spiritual exercises and forms of involvement in the apostolic life of the Assumption. These tertiaries of the Assumption also had a feminine branch: the wife of Professor Germer-Durand, Cécile, who became an Oblate of the Assumption after her husband died, was one of its first members.

### Rome did not understand

The third order as conceived by d'Alzon was not a simple pious association but a constituent part of the Assumption and its apostolic project: the secular brothers were considered to belong to the Order, according to a proposal submitted for recognition by the Church. But Rome did not understand a situation of lay people, not living in community and not pronouncing the traditional vows of religion, being part of the Congregation. Discussions about this lasted half a century, without success. In the Constitutions of 1906 and 1918, tertiaries were no longer mentioned, only affiliates to the Assumption, an expression that disappeared in the text of 1923 that were aligned to the strict regulations of the Code of Canon Law of 1917.

From then on, despite the disappointment, in submitting to the requirements of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulators, all that remained were Choir Religious and Lay-Brothers. So, one of the significant intuitions of our foundation disappeared. But, the d'Alzonian genes remained and one can read, in the light of this history, the present research into an institutional form of alliance with the laity sharing our spirituality and our apostolic works.

## An Alliance *knows no frontiers*



The Lay-religious Alliance is lived differently in the following countries so here is a short tour of the world through the experience of the International lay-religious Commission.

**Marie-Pierre Girard**

### **North America**

In the United States, some laity have organised themselves to use their expertise to help others. So in the parish of Saint Anne, Fiskdale (Massachusetts), a program of theological reflection has been running for two years to reflect on the Rule of life producing some excellent sharing. In Brighton, the Assumptionist community welcomes laymen to live with them. *"Concerning the future, I would like to launch a monthly meeting with lay Assumptionists to reflect on a passage of the life Rule or on Saint Augustine"*, explained Joe Pagano, who represents the American laity on the international lay-religious commission.

### **Latin America**

In Mexico, Assumptionists animate three groups of lay people in very different missions. The first has a mission to search for religious, priestly or lay vocations by gathering young people for days of retreat and a parish mission. Another focuses on the community aspect and has a rule of life based on the spirit of the Assumption. It meets every week to pray, for personal formation and for sharing. These meetings seek to support family life, and religious or professional commitments, and end with a fraternal meal. The third most recent group focuses on the needs of the poor who do not have the means to access the medical services.

In Chile and in Argentina, a close collaboration has existed for a long time between the laity and religious. First lived in the parishes, it is at the origin of Assumptionist communities who share their life and spirituality with them. They provide a path of formation in the spirit of the Assumption so that this spirit permeates the personal, domestic, professional and pastoral life of each one.

### **Europe**

In **Spain**, the national Pilgrimage in 2000 attracted 55 religious and lay people triggered the desire for a deeper connection with the Assumption. Three groups of laity were constituted: one in Almeria

(Andalusia) and two in Madrid. A new stage began in 2005, the links between the laity and the communities is gradually taking root and there is more and more sharing. At a local level, two lay people and a religious meet every month to organise a programme of events including two annual retreats, in Advent and Lent. At the provincial level, there are meetings and celebrations for the feasts of Father d'Alzon, the Assumptionist martyrs or the Forum in June. 2006 was marked by the first Assembly aiming to create a federation of the different groups in the province. Today, a project for Lay Assumptionist communities, born from a desire by some to live their baptismal commitment more actively, is taking shape.

In **North Europe**, the lay-religious collaboration was already a reality in the Maranatha community in Brussels and in the four colleges of the Assumption. "But a new desire is being articulated", explained Pierre Rion, who represents Belgium on the International Commission. Some lay people are called to participate more in the running of the Province. In the colleges, for example, the project of an alliance has led to events being organised to encourage the sharing of the Assumptionist Charism with the teaching staff. "In the long term, the alliance encourages a convergence and an increased sharing between the laity who participate in the missions of the Assumption and, for those who, until now, were not sufficiently connected with the Assumption, an opportunity to meet", is the hope of Pierre Rion.

## Can a Rule of Life really change everything?

God speaks, and when God speaks, God unveils for us the love, beauty and sweetness, the hope, charity, simplicity, prayer, and communion... in fact as many values as we are able to receive, and yet values so difficult to live and to share in our daily lives.

What can we do so as not to forget these values when everything around us separates us from them?

In a complex world, where each person is so sure of their truths, how can we prevent ourselves from doing so much that we forget the Essentials?

I want to live these Essentials because it is the one who is their source who raises us to the Father.

He is the one who teaches us to go further and not become a slave to self-consciousness.

He is the one who teaches us to become more faithful to the Spirit each day.

But the Spirit cannot manifest itself if our hearts are hardened and our own preoccupations sweep from our memories the alliance we once made with Him and for Him.

I dreamed of an absolute who would bestow the values of the Spirit on us and make them grow.

I dreamed of an absolute who would sustain us when the path became chaotic and who would remind us of the alliance that we had made with God.

I dreamed of an absolute who would be the door that opens onto the path of truth and who would renew us every time we were in communion with him.

One day, I received the Rule of Life of the Assumption. After baptism and confirmation, this was the most precious gift than anyone had ever offered me. I discovered with wonder that this Rule of Life contained everything that I believed to be important because it contained the values of the Spirit and the values of the Church.

Today, thanks to this rule of life, I conscientiously bear these values within me. It reminds me of the path I must follow. It reminds me to have courage when I feel alone, disorientated, without resources or hope amongst men and women who have lost the sense of their being. This Rule of Life allows me to continually return to the essentials, to the source: Christ is there alive, just waiting for us to utter our "yes".

So together, let us learn how to offer our Father a committed "yes" so as to allow him to finish his work in us and so accomplish the miracle of the resurrection: "In him, with him and for him, who is revealed in our mortal flesh, the promise of a new man, the promise of a man renewed in the Spirit, and the promise of the arrival of His kingdom".

"Lord, grant me the grace to remain faithful to you and through this Rule of Life, may I renew my alliance with you every day. Permit me to grow in courage to go forward, the discipline not to go backwards, the perseverance to continue to the end and the audacity to contribute to your Kingdom so that Your Kingdom Comes."

A Testimony from Michelle

The Laity & Religious  
follow the path that  
Emmanuel d'Alzon,  
founder of the  
Assumptionists & Oblates,  
wanted them to follow



**One family**  
with great spiritual variety

**The lay-religious alliance: each Assumptionist Congregation lives this alliance in its own way, in fidelity to the intuition of its founders and always with the same concern to listen, to be open and welcoming in the service of others. If the forms of commitment are different and if each of these Lay branches of the family of the Assumption lives for the moment its own routine, little by little they will come to a better understanding of each other. To present this diversity to you, here are five lay people who find in the Assumption a real spiritual family and who live its Charism passionately.**

Marie Danler.

Céline Hoyeau and Nicolas Senèze

### **Jeanne Palombieri, "knitting a pattern" for more than 30 years with the Assumption**

The Friends of the Assumption are a group of lay people who have developed a friendly and neighbourly relationship and who spend time praying together, going on retreats together and deepening their understanding of the spirituality of the Assumption, or, who collaborate with one of the Assumptionist projects (schools, medical centres, development projects). Some of the Friends of the Assumption want a form of commitment that is deeper and more lasting at the heart of a group of Lay Assumptionists called an Assumptionist Fraternity of Lay Assumption Communities according to the region of the world.

When the lay-religious alliance began in 2005 within the Assumption, Jeanne Palombieri saw in it the completion of what she had brought there, something she had ripened and lived for more than 30 years. This mother of three children and her husband met the Assumption while they were students staying at the chaplaincy in Cachan. The couple became friends with young Assumptionists. One, then two, then three... *"Together, we reflected on our respective vocations, each one was mutually "encouraged" by the other. It was like knitting something together in which we each contributed to the pattern"*, she recalls. The exchanges, holidays together, and especially, sharing an ideal for justice and fraternity, in which a couple takes root. *"We had discovered an innovative place in the Church, where students, religious and young people in difficulty rub shoulders all on an equal footing"*; a social commitment that took over more and more of Jeanne's life. This energetic and cordial social worker decided to leave her profession to dedicate herself 100% to voluntary work on the barge "Je Sers" (c.f. L'Assomption et ses Oeuvres n° 708), in Conflans. Every year, this dynamic individual, whose motto is *"be close to"*, organizes for people in great difficulty a pilgrimage to Lourdes, holidays at Le Chateau, at Beaufortain, with a team of Assumptionists. This commitment did not weaken her marriage, on the contrary, *"Gérard is more discreet, but he*

*is always present. Without him, I could not do all that I do," she confided. "We have found our place as a married couple in the Assumption."*

### **Maria Neves Zinha, with the Little Sisters,**

*"My life is made up of many sufferings and struggles!" At 63, Maria Neves Zinha lives in Betim, one of the poorest cities of the State of Minas Gerais in Southeast Brazil. It was in her district that she met the Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA). "They are simple, kind, and welcoming. They were always present in our struggles. Their way of living speaks to us of God", testifies this mother of five children, of which two have died. "As I grew to know these sisters better, I began to hear a lot about Father Étienne Pernet and Marie de Jésus" she says. "I discovered their history and it looked very similar to mine". As well being responsible for a Basic Community, Maria Neves Zinha also participates in a group of laity linked with the Little Sisters (the ILFA). "I cannot stop of saying that their history is so much like mine, as I recall the path travelled with this group: it is there that I discovered the spirituality of the LSAs, that produced within me the desire to live it" she acknowledged. "This is where I feel that we can really be just one family. Yes, the world can really be one family with relationships of solidarity and fraternity".*

Father Pernet, founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, created a Fraternity of Our Lady of the Assumption, for the evangelisation of working class families. There are about twenty of these groups in France and elsewhere made up of ordinary people happy to speak about their lives in a fraternal atmosphere. Consecrated laity, the Associates seek to make Jesus Christ present in their local environment and places of work in the spirit of Father Pernet.

### **Olivier Le Gendre, a call to commitment**

«Olivier Le Gendre was responsible for the world wide "Lay" branch of the Religious of the Assumption since its creation at the General Chapter in 2000. Those who decide to belong to it make a triple commitment: prayer, group meetings and ecclesiastical service or charitable work... He is a member of the Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Nanterre, in the Paris region. Since he made his acquaintance with the Religious of the Assumption, fifteen years ago, Olivier Le Gendre said *"I was greatly struck by the remarkable capacity and diversity of their welcome"* of those whom he calls *"my sisters"*. He is both a writer (1) and a Consultant in Business Strategy. At 56 he has discovered *"in their spirituality both action and contemplation"*. In his eyes, the Lay-Religious alliance proceeds from the same intuition, *"a way of being Church founded on a strong spirituality"*. And if at the moment, *"the lay branches of the five Assumptionist families live their own styles of life; then as they come to understand themselves better, why not seek ways to collaborate"*.

(1) He wrote a book on the founder of the Religious Saint Marie-Eugénie of Jesus who was canonized on June 3 2007.

### **Rozenn Le Menn, teacher and «pupil» of the Assumption**

In education the Oblates of the Assumption have links with many lay people, teachers and other members of scholastic institutions. They also have Associations of solidarity providing support for projects in Africa and Romania. Korean families regularly come to visit the sisters in France.

*"I understood that something important had happened"*. Rozenn Le Menn is all new to the alliance, but her practicum on the spirit of the Assumption, in November at Valpré, marked a turning point in her life. *"A sister spoke a great deal at the beginning about the world of Father d'Alzon, his concern for people in his own time. This is what I wanted to live"*. Until then, this young maths teacher had not found a spiritual family in the Church. But, in 2001, on arriving at the college of Saint Anne du Bouscat, near Bordeaux run by the Oblates of the Assumption, Rozenn felt at home. *"I appreciated their concern to understand each pupil's situation, Christian or not, and to help them grow in the world around them and a listening that I had not found in my previous establishments"*. Working closely with the Oblates provided her with real support for her profession. It has been a true collaboration because next year Rozenn Le Menn has been chosen to replace Sister Christophe as Head of the College.

Anne-Yvonne Le Buf, associated with the Orantes

"The family of the Assumption dear to my heart is the Orantes." The faith journey of Anne-Yvonne Le Buf is inextricably linked with these contemplative nuns--, discovered in Marseille in January, 1993, some days shortly after her conversion. "They knew how to feed my spiritual thirst and helped me reflect on my life using the writings of Saint Augustine", she remembers. Since her association with the Orantes of the Assumption, in December 1993, her personal prayer and commitment are fully part of her daily life, in accordance with the Charter of Associates and their booklet of commitment (1). "Mother Isabelle was always careful that the Orantes remain open to the outside world", explained this Administrator of Air France who lives in Lyon today. And she is so enthusiastic about the diversity lived by laity from all countries and all cultures: «What a richness to feel united in our common commitment and common desire: always to adore, always to love, always to be grateful! »

(1) Entitled "My mission to pray in the world with the Orantes of the Assumption.»

The Associates of the Orantes meet twice a year for a long week-end of reflection and prayer at one of the Orante's communities. This commitment provides spiritual support for their daily lives and work and for their service among the people of the world.

## *"It must evolve naturally"*

Guzman Carriquiry, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, reveals the diversity of incentives and commitments of the lay associations attached to different Congregations.

Interviewed by Isabelle de Gaulmyn, in Rome,

**In Rome, how do you see the renewal of committed lay movements by Congregations?** Guzman Carriquiry: what are called Third Orders, from a legal view point depend on the Congregation for Religious Life. But on a pastoral level, we, the Council for the Laity, are responsible for them. It is necessary to place this in the larger context of the reorganization of the Associated Life of the laity in the Church. First we have traditional movements of Catholic Action engaged with the world. Next, added to these groups over the last thirty years are other forms of associations: the movements and new communities, the NGO, involving many Christians, even though their vocation is not explicitly religious. And lastly, this other current, that is also growing in strength, the involvement of the Lay faithful in the Charism and life of the Families of Orders or Religious Congregations.

**What kind of discernment process do you use?**

—Actually, many Superiors of Congregations seek advice from us. They tell us that they have developed strong relationships with the Laity at a parish level or in their projects, religious schools for example, and that they wish to establish a structure for these relationships. These Superiors are conscious that the Charism that has been given to them to sustain a life of total consecration to Christ, is also a gift for the edification of the Church. In some cases, the founder himself had foreseen a Lay Association. The problem is to work out how to organize this either in a very autonomous associative form, or, conversely, as a Third Order closely connected with the Congregation.

**How do you help them create a good legal position?**

—We question the Religious Congregations about their true incentives for creating these associations. Some do it, because of their immediate pastoral concerns: these are the aging Congregations or Orders, who do not know how they will manage their works or how to take care of their aging religious. The creation of an Association of lay people therefore seeks indirectly to respond to the lack of religious vocations. There, we see a danger: this is a very bad solution, because the Congregation does not have the strength to transmit its Charism, it is only able to transmit its works. In our eyes, it must be the consequence of a natural process: if the Congregation still has its missionary energy, the laity are attracted by its witness to a radical Christian life. One can then consider the creation of an autonomous association but linked as well with the Charisma of the Congregation in a form of diaconate.