

# North Belgium



## Statistics of the Province

### Religious:

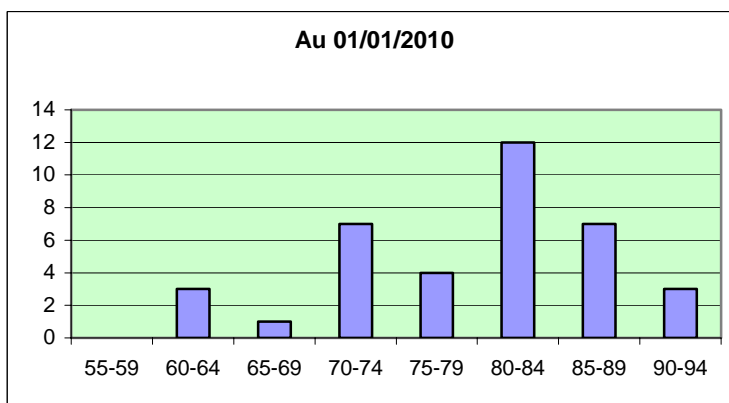
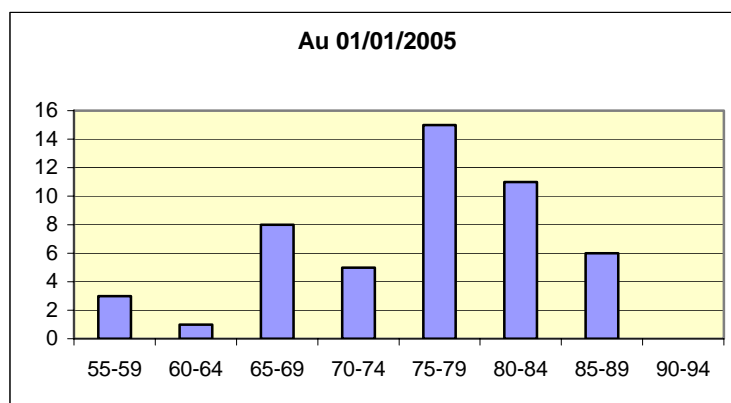
	Religious Priests	Religious Perp. Prof.	Religious Temp. Prof.	Total	Novices	Postulants
on 01.01.05	44	4	0	48	0	0
on 01.01.99	57	4	0	61	0	0

**Communities:**

		Local Communities		Regional Communities		Attached	Isoled (*)
		Communities	Religious	Communities	Religious		
Country	Belgique	4	29	0	0	16	0
	Afrique					1	
	Colombie					3	
Total	01.01.05	4	29	0	0	20	0
	01.01.99	6	33	1	3	25	0

Since 1999:                    2    Communities have been closed (*Kapelle-op-den-Bos et Borsbeek Sint-Jan Berchmans*)  
    0    Were opened  
    0    Communities merged

**A pyramid of ages (between 1999 and 2004, with a projection up to 2010)**



The forecast for 01.01.2010 was based on data in January 2005.

## **Evolution of the Province since 1999**

A report which will be presented to the General Chapter considers the past before coming to the present and, if possible, tries to establish points of reference which could indicate the road to follow in the near future.

A difficult task.

Three Provincials in six years: the regretted Jef Bergmans, Arnold Castro and Lambert Maurissen. Two Provincial Bursars: Paul Dillen

It is difficult to foresee the future: what will the new structures be? The General Chapter will make decisions about these. We wish to wait for the second session of our Provincial Chapter before making decisions in the light of the outcome of the General Chapter.

## **The Country and the Church**

I refer to the considerations of our confrères of South Belgium in the presentation of notable events in our country and in the Church.

Consider that in Flemish country the organizations labeled Christian have always been well anchored in social life and even political life; even more than in the Walloon section: youth movements, labor groups, hospitals. Instruction at all levels is always predominant (up to 70%).

In the nineties, there was an attempt to make the name 'Christian' disappear. . . . Today people are happy that it was not successful. If the Christian spirit has only the warmth of old age, people aspire once again to rediscover its values.

The Christian party C.V.P., after 50 years of governing leadership through all sorts of coalitions was pushed aside into the opposition around the year 2000. The coalition of socialists and liberals has governed with a feeling of 'vengeance.' Today the C.D.V. (Christian democrats. . .) is back in the saddle and putting a new stress on Christian values.

What is remarkable: the Flemish socialist president writes the leading article in a book on Christian and religious values. A move with political interest? Possibly. But he also, like other political men recognizes that for many voters Christian values are still very much alive.

## **Assumptionist Reality**

### **The religious**

The province numbered 61 religious in 1999. On January 1 we were 48 (including 4 transferred).

One colleague is still in Africa, Edgar Cuypers. He was affiliated to the Province of Africa but has asked to change his status and be affiliated to our Province while remaining in Africa as a transferred religious.

Our three colleagues in Colombia have asked to remain affiliated members of North Belgium but remain in Colombia as transferred religious to the Province of Chile-Argentina.

Cornie Nelissen is back home in our Province after ten years in Romania and the last three years in the General House.

After many years of parish apostolate in Germany with our Dutch colleagues, Eugene de Zwart has returned to North Belgium.

## **The Closure of two houses**

### ***Kapelle-op-den-Bos***

After the departure and the death of Frans Houbey, the community, founded more than 75 years ago as an aluminate, had to be closed.

### ***Borsbeek Sint-Jan Berchmans***

The Sint-Jan-Berchmans parish, an 'Assumptionist' parish, founded after the second war, will be given to the Diocese of Antwerpen. The beautiful church, built by our fathers, is one of the three churches of the diocese dedicated to religious gatherings of young people in the province of Antwerp.

## **The communities**

### ***Borsbeek Sint-Jacobus and Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe***

Two small communities numbering two religious but closely linked with several colleagues connected to each of them. One colleague is active as the Pastor of two parishes; the others, who are all of a 'certain age,' are occupied in the pastoral care of the sick or assure a 'liturgy in the two national languages in the chapel of 'Marie the Miserable ' in the Brussels region.

### ***The two large communities: Leuven and Zepperen***

The majority of our colleagues in these communities – as in the whole province – are over 75 years of age. The elderly have a substantial presence in their community. They have great solicitude for fraternal life and for being a praying community.

The contribution of our two communities in the pastoral apostolate is still very significant: responsibilities in parishes, prayer groups, preaching, visiting hospitals and retirement homes, relations with the laity and, for several colleagues in addition to their function of being superior or Bursar, responsibilities in the government of the Province.

It happens that our colleagues 'in retirement' must work 'like four.'

It will be necessary, however, to take care that responsibilities of government do not become too heavy for those who are still available to take care of the colleagues entrusted to them both at Zepperen and Louvain.

## **An aging Province**

A similar landscape is experienced by all the congregations in Flanders: the average age is rising and there is almost a total lack of vocations. Close to two thirds of our colleagues are over 75. The three youngest are 57 and 58. There have been 12 deaths since 1999 (20%). The reduction in apostolic and pastoral activity because of age or problems of health is the first victim of this. Very difficult decisions like the closing of two communities were inevitable.

Our important concern is to make every effort to see that elderly religious and those who are sick or in poor health can remain in their communities as long as possible. The house of Louvain, well situated close to hospitals and medical care homes, will be improved so as to welcome colleagues in poor health. Thus, religious will be able to participate for as long as possible in community life and will be able to remain involved in the daily timetable.

## **The relationship between religious and laity**

The five colleagues who are Pastors of parishes could not function without the contribution of the laity who often carry important responsibilities in the organization of the parish and even in the decision-making process.

In our two colleges a close collaboration between the religious and the laity has existed since the sixties.

Kapelle-op-den-Bos, a large college, which today has more than 1300 pupils, began its days in 1929 as a small aluminate involving 7 religious and about thirty alumnists. Despite the departure of the Assumptionist community, it remains very much attached to the Assumption which retains a presence of two religious on the Governing Body.

In Zepperen, nearly a hundred years old, a community of nine religious in retirement remains very active in the life of the college.

What is the future of these colleges? Will the Assumption still have a place even when there is no longer an Assumptionist community there? How can we persevere in supporting these two establishments? Will our lay successors continue to work in the spirit they inherited from their founders?

The Governing Bodies and the Directors are anxious to maintain links with us and have decided to continue their work as educators in the spirit of the Assumption. The two directors, Luc Van Riet—who was the moderator at our Chapter—and Jef De Lombaerde—he will represent our laity in Rome—came to the Chapter to speak about their attachment to the Assumption. In union with the two colleges in South Belgium, they advocate «the major values for an Assumptionist project» which they define as follows: «educate to love, to respect others, to work of quality, to a critical mind, to attentiveness towards others, to concern for liberty, truth and simplicity. In a word, to educate in the spirit of the gospel under the light of the Assumption.»

The link between religious and laity in the pastoral field and in education, the desire to live and work with the laity in a spirit proper to the Assumption, remains a priority for us.

## **The Restructuring of our Provinces**

The Province of North Belgium is reflecting on the introductory texts of the draft Statutes of a Province of Northern Europe (#7).

Following the call of the General Chapter of 1999 about 'Aging Provinces', an effort of collaboration between the Provinces of Belgium and Holland has been undertaken. The situation of the Province of North Belgium from the point of view age and lack of new candidates is that in three or four years it will be unable to respond to the demands of a Province worthy of the name. It will be necessary, therefore, to restructure.

We do not see that a single Province of Europe can be organized in the near future. More realistic is what we call 'Europe of the North': the three Provinces of Belgium and Holland. For some years the relationship between the three Provinces has intensified, the problems of ageing are quite identical, and the geographical proximity remains an element not to be overlooked.

## **The future of our Province**

For the organization of the years to come we need to wait for the second session of the Provincial Chapter when one will learn what the structure of the Congregation will be.

An aging Province, lack of vocations, closing houses... these are sufficiently discouraging facts in themselves. And yet our fraternal meetings—three or four times a year—are not at all sad. It is true that the topic of conversation is more about the past than the future. But we know that our poverty and our weakness which we endure trusting in Providence are our contribution to the realization of the Assumptionist motto 'Adveniat Regnum tuum.' «When I am weak then I am strong» 2 Cor. 12:10

Fr. Lambert Maurissen, a.a  
Provincial Superior