Habit taking: the Notre Dame de Grâce Inter-African Novitiate in Bobo-Dioulasso welcomes 23 first-year novices

On Monday, 8 December, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the *Notre Dame de Grâce* Inter-African Novitiate in Bobo-Dioulasso welcomed the postulants who have become first-year novices and are beginning their formation journey in the Novitiate; a ceremony rich in symbolism and deep Lasallian spirituality.

A total of twenty-three young men participated in the initiation and habit taking ceremony, coming from five Districts and the Delegation of the French-speaking area of the Lasallian Region of Africa: the District of Central Africa has one novice; the Lasallian District of West Africa (DILAO) has eight; five novices come from the District of Madagascar; four from the Delegation of Rwanda; and five novices from the District of Congo Kinshasa.

During the celebration, Brother Jovite Diarra, Auxiliary Visitor, on behalf of Brother Rodrigue Toeppen, Visitor of the Lasallian District of West Africa (DILAO), invited the novices to follow the path proposed by the Gospel of St. John in three stages: first, he invited the novices to dialogue and openness; secondly, he invited them to seek the "true water", the "living water" that is Jesus Christ, who must give meaning to their commitment; and thirdly, the new novices were invited to witness and mission.

"May Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception grant you a fruitful novitiate for yourselves and for the people you will meet at a well, on a road, in a classroom, in a family", Brother Jovite implored the Virgin Mary.

For his part, the novice Brother Jean-Michel Nayo, on behalf of the "Saint Scubilion cohort", recalled the motto of the Novitiate: "All is connected! Let us be more by having less". He then referred to the theme of the formation programme: "Jesus Christ unites me to Him to promote integral ecological conversion and

universal fraternity through the educational and evangelising service of the poor".

"I will explain the different parts of the theme of our journey, which can be summarised in four parts.

1. **Jesus Christ associates me with Him: a vocation of communion and mission**. This expression affirms that the mission comes from a call from Christ. Being associated with Jesus means entering into His vision, adopting His lifestyle, and sharing His mission. In the Lasallian tradition, this expresses consecration to the educational service of the poor. It is a grace received and a responsibility to be lived.

2. **Promoting integral ecological conversion: converting with all creation**. Inspired by *Laudato si'* and *Laudate Deum*, the Pope's encyclicals, integral ecological conversion reminds us that everything is connected: God, human beings and nature. It implies a profound change in our way of life, an ecological spirituality, sobriety and concrete gestures. It is a spiritual, moral, relational and communal conversion.

3. **Universal fraternity: becoming artisans of unity.** In the Pope's encyclical letter on universal fraternity, *Fratelli tutti,* he calls on us to live as brothers and sisters without borders. This includes rejecting discrimination and promoting dialogue, peace and mutual respect. In religious formation, this is lived out through welcoming, listening, communion and overcoming divisions. The religious becomes a builder of bridges.

4. **Through the educational and evangelising service of the poor.** The theme is realised in the Lasallian charism: teaching, accompanying and evangelising the poor. Education becomes a place of ecological conversion (forming in responsibility towards creation) and universal fraternity (educating in peace and solidarity). It is a humble, incarnate mission, close to young people.

Novice Brother Jean-Michel concluded by stating that "the theme invites our cohort to be united with Christ as the source of the mission; to live ecological conversion; to build universal fraternity; to serve the poor in the De La Salle's spirit". "On this blessed day, at the Inter-African Novitiate in Bobo-Dioulasso, we humbly renew our 'yes' to Christ, following the example of Saint John Baptist de

La Salle, trusting in the one who has called us and who accomplishes his work in us. May the Lord grant us the grace of fidelity, simplicity, fraternal charity and zeal for the education of young people, especially the most destitute ones”.

* *Article written by Brother Élisée Lare, DILAO Secretariat.*